

IMPROBABLE MISSIONS

The Mississippi oral history project

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“What should young people do with their lives today?
Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to
create stable communities in which the terrible disease
of loneliness can be cured.”

Kurt Vonnegut

In an address given to the graduates of the 1974 class
of Hobart and William Smith Colleges

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1. Introduction

1.1. What is Missimp?

Missimp is believed to be the longest continually running, open, improvised comedy group in the united kingdom. Running from 1998 and still continuing today, incorporating as a Community Interest Company (CIC) on 20 November 2019. Originally the group was named 'Mission Improbable', but this was shortened to the portmanteau 'Missimp'. Missimp as a community is the subject of this oral history project, focusing on the memories of some of those who have contributed to it.

1.2. Who has been interviewed?

Missimp has touched the lives of hundreds of people around the country, and even some from around the world. However, only a small selection could be interviewed for this oral history. The interviews mainly focus on those who had a large impact on the community, including members of Missimp's earliest iteration, some influential people in key points of Missimp's development, and members of the first executive group after incorporation as a CIC. The project also includes the teacher of the course which led to the original team being founded, who introduced improv to nottingham, as well as the founder, director of the nottingham comedy festival, and the founder and director of the Glee Club chain of comedy venues where Missimp performed for a time.

1.3. What do these interviews cover?

The three key themes of the interview are 'the craft of improvised comedy', 'the spaces and places where Missimp were active', and 'the people who make up the community engaged by Missimp'. While these themes are the most important parts of the project, there are also many tangents which provide a more vivid picture of the experiences of those involved. The project also takes particular interest in leadership and decision making involved in managing a community based on improv.

1.4. When were these interviews recorded?

These interviews were recorded between the beginning of January 2020 to the end of March 2021. Its important to note that this period was heavily effected by the Covid-19 global pandemic, which changed the way the interviews were recorded. Many parts of the project were effected and some had to be cancelled, as explained later in this document.

1.5. Where were these interviews recorded?

Where possible, interviews were recorded in person, around Nottingham. However, some were recorded over the video conferencing software called Zoom.

1.6. How were these interviews created?

Each interview consisted of two sections, approximately 45min long. These interviews were then transcribed and reviewed following the editorial process described in chapter 3. Information was edited where the effect was judged to be detrimental to the community, those participating on the project or those who did not have the opportunity to respond. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to read and request changes to their transcript. The transcription process was partly automated using the

web service otter.ai to do an initial transcription and then read through to correct mistakes in the transcription process.

1.7. Why is this oral history being created?

Much of improvised comedy is transient in nature due to how the moment of creation happens at the same time as the performance. The same is true of a community developing, with many changes and decisions happening without being formally recorded, or in happening in an ad hoc manner. This is true for most improv, but for a community like Missimp, it has been happening over many years. A lot has happened and much of this only exists as memories. These memories are very important. Missimp's longevity is significant and stands as an example of the durability of creative communities. The memories recorded also show how this community-focused group has had a significant impact on the comedy community across Nottinghamshire, the Midlands, the United Kingdom, and even further.

Its also got funny bits. Thats got be worth something.

2. Preface

“Well fuck” (by the way, there is swearing in this history. i hope you don’t mind).

That’s what i said. I wanted to find what the key themes of this oral history were, so i poured it into a word cloud generator. Out of the 250,000-odd words in this oral history, there are two that sat big and bold amongst all others. “Richard”, and “Minkley”. “Well, fuck” indeed. As an oral historian, you are supposed to try to remove yourself from the process. You let the people you are interviewing be the focus. But it’s the same problem we always have; historians leave fingerprints on their work, and I am no exception. So it looks like i’ve got some explaining to do.

Trying to write everything down, something strange happened. A lot of irony revealed itself. Irony dogs history, and i think history takes a lot of pleasure in the fact. Stranger still, the irony reveals themes in the oral history I hadn’t realised were so important. So if you’ll indulge me, I would like to tell you some of my story, so you know where this work came from. Call it context, or bias, or just more history. Whichever it is, take it like everything else in this hefty pile of words; it needs remembering.

To begin, we have to remember that some things happen, regardless of whether we want them to or not. The clock started on the Missimp Oral History Project on 10th January 2020. It turned out, 20 days later, there was one hell of a something already sweeping the planet, ready to sweep through the whole human race, quite literally. On the 30th January 2020, The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency of international concern. The clock had begun on a global pandemic caused by a novel coronavirus, given the name Covid-19. “Well, Fuck” indeed.

It turns out a global pandemic makes recording an oral history a lot more difficult than first thought. It’s distasteful to mention the two in the same breath, I know. In one moment, a plague was stealing the lives of millions. We would check with horror as the number of daily cases crept up and the lines on the graph climbed higher. Yet in another moment, we just got on with the dull business of living in limited circumstances. Horrible and mundane in near-equal measure. It was surreal, absurd even, and it’s easy to forget what life was like in the pandemic. It’s how we recover from such brutal stress. The mind lets go of it and it becomes the past. And so, we forget.

But there is a quiet smell in a cool breeze that triggers those memories back to life again. They take me back to transcribing an interview, sitting by an open window. The sound of the city of Nottingham was palpably, unnervingly, silent. With no noise to cover up the reverberations coming from the buildings, the absence of sound made the city seem so much bigger. The enormity of that silence is something I don’t think I’ll ever feel again. I turned away from that sensation which will define one history and towards another, “Improbable Missions; The Missimp Oral History Project”. Back in went the ear buds, and back to producing this document I went.

You think you would never forget the feeling, and yet in that breeze I realise you do forget. Part of surviving was remembering that the sound my city no longer made was not lost. It was waiting to begin again. In that silence there were so many people waiting to find their way back to each other. It was a challenge. We didn’t know when our ordeal would end. For me, in many ways, it meant remembering that my community was still out there. So recording the memories of those who

contributed to this oral history was not as absurd as it first seemed. Missimp was still out there too, waiting to pick up where it left off. And thankfully, in time, it did.

That jarring realisation that you can forget an entire way of life that rose-up against contagion, it tells you a lot about our memories. They are far stranger creatures than we are. They come into this world, they persist a while, and they vanish. But the strange thing is they can be rediscovered and brought back to life again. What's more, when we share out stories, they aren't just revived, they grow. This is how oral traditions survive. They are passed on, over and over. Each discovery summons the past back into the present and gives it another go at life. An oral history is a way of recording these memories as they're brought back and before they slip away again.

It's no coincidence that Missimp gets to have an oral history. Improv is an oral tradition. The two work the same. Improv relies on someone teaching someone else how to play the game. One person teaching another, who teaches another, who teaches another. The game plays on and on, with a shared memory being constantly, actively, kept alive. The game is simple; "Yes, and". We accept and we build. It's simple, but the lesson reinforces a tradition. We receive and we grow. It's in this way, anyone, doing any Improv, any time, any place, is playing a part in a delightful story of survival. Whatever game they play or scene they perform, it keeps a special kind of joy alive.

This joy lives through people. It spreads through the performers and their communities, but unlike a virus, it makes people feel alive. It's the memories of those people I sought to capture in this oral history. In doing so, they reveal how Missimp managed to grow out of what was a short course in comedy, to a thriving community. They describe how Missimp influenced the foundation of our part of the UK comedy scene. They describe many variations of what improv can be. They reveal surprising challenges that are found in both make-shift and established comedy venues. They remind us strides forward come from problems to be confronted. But most of all, it meant puns. Goodness gracious me, it meant puns. Through it all, joy survived. Delightfully so.

But there is that irony though, watching with an eager smile on its face. This oral history is less than it was supposed to be. Even with the limits reality and a pandemic imposes, fewer stories were recorded than should have been. And this is where things get personal and messy.

The project was to be 12 months long, but exactly 364 days after it began, I was in the emergency department of the Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham. Not because of Covid, but because of a suicidal climax in a long mental health struggle. I went and had a mental breakdown. A proper big one, as well. Again, "Well, fuck" indeed. It almost led to this oral history never being finished, never mind published. These kinds of personal crises are uncomfortable to litigate, so I'll spare you that story. Yet it is part of the context of this project. There is one force in particular this kind of calamity introduced that needs to be reckoned with; post traumatic stress disorder. Or rather, my post traumatic stress disorder.

PTSD is the destructive antithesis of remembering the past. The condition neurologically changes your brain, and so changes the memories it contains. Some get "memory-holed"; destroyed and lost forever. Some memories corrupt into psychosis; reality leaking away and something else entirely seeping in. Some memories, however, turn violent. Your biology reacts as if physically under attack. Remembering becomes an assault, and forgetting becomes a defense. To cope while i couldn't cope, I did what many do in this position; retreated to social isolation. I became trapped in the very same

response that the human race used to protect one-another from Covid. And so, we add another irony to the story. My own personal, less than delightful, survival.

And now i must admit, to my shame, I don't go to Missimp anymore. At first it was just a few weeks, then months. Somehow time slipped by and it's now been years. I miss it terribly. But to return means confronting who i've become. The transformation is brutal. What was a normal memory, even a good one, becomes traumatic through time and loss. What made you happy makes you sad. Other people make you feel lonely. Belonging just leaves you longing. So i've stayed isolated and my personal forgetting is taking hold. In this way, the trauma tried to kill the oral history, just as it tried to kill me.

If you couldn't tell already though, I survived, as did the project. Recovery is slow and hard but here I am, finishing the job. Piecing my life back together and piecing this oral history together are one and the same; coming to terms with the past. I'm reconciling the ghost of the person who made this oral history happen with the ghost that I've become. But, if I am to be a ghost of Missimp past, it looks like irony is on my side this time.

My perspective has changed so radically. Having captured part of the spirit of this community, I feel its absence so much more keenly. I found the fragile thread wasn't so fragile after all. I was. That story is my perspective, and if i'm being honest, after all is said and done, it's one hell of a perspective to have. I look at this work through all this heartache, and those themes i wanted to find are revealed far clearer than any word-cloud could ever hope to manage.

Success and failure. Resilience and vulnerability. Remembering and forgetting. And above all else, What survives, and how it survives.

I have had the good fortune to sit and talk to experienced improvisers. I've heard the parts they and others have played in shaping Missimp. I can see the chain that links the early pioneer of theatre games, Viola Spolin, person by person, game by game, right the way to whoever turned up to this weeks drop-in. I've seen what people can achieve by the simple act of playing this game together, and keeping that delightful joy alive. It's been a gift to be given this story. I hope that this oral history will be seen as a gift, from me, to show that the community is worth all these words and all these pages and many more after that.

So here we are. The voices are on the tape. The words are on the page. The memories will be protected. The goal has been achieved. After everything I've been through, I want to impose upon you a vital lesson.

Protect the memory of what you care about.

There may be a place, a community, maybe just one single person, that you think the world of. You too might discover that some things happen, regardless of whether you want them to or not. Some great force can sweep through your life and you'll discover everything has changed. For all the pain and failure I endured, I can tell you this. I recorded what i cared about when I could. That record will be kept safe and not forgotten.

Perhaps we will always be buried in the past. But remember this; one day, I might get better. I might be able to listen back and discover all those treasures I thought I'd lost were not as lost as I first thought. And remember too, that Missimp is still out there, ready for me to discover all over again. The

game is still being played, and there is a chance that it might one day breathe life back into me, just as i hope this oral history has breathed life back into these memories. So if you will indulge me just a little while longer, I have one more story to add...

I have seen it written that “There will never be a profound Improv set”. This isn’t true, because I’ve seen one. It happened on Thursday 18th October 2018. It happened in Nottingham. It was in The Malt Cross. A gorgeous music hall that, to us, feels like home. It was full of people from the local community. Some performers had left Nottingham for pastures new but returned for the show. They were both young and, well, let’s say not quite so young anymore. All of it was improvised on the night. The content was ridiculous, naturally. The night was fantastic. Not a surprise from people who practice their craft week in week out, in some cases, having done so for years. It was the celebration of Missimp’s 20th anniversary as a community, and it was a real celebration.

You can be forgiven for not seeing such a show as profound, but you couldn’t miss the reason why it was profound. It was joyful, truly joyful. There is so much joy that has been lived, and is still being lived, because of Missimp. It’s staggering, and it’s important. It’s where friends are made, where we learn and grow, where we find confidence and pride. It’s where we release the pressure and are revitalised. It’s the safety net and the support network. I can even say its where romance can blossom and even... well... I’ll leave that one to your imagination. Thats what Missimp means to those who are a part of it. All this human flourishing because of joy, which on that night, proved it stood the test of time. People brought together in joy are so brilliantly alive. If that is not profound, then nothing is.

Believe me when I tell you, this only becomes more apparent when it’s gone. Painfully so. But thats where Missimp has something so rare. It’s not its history, though that history is a treasure. It’s not its community, though that community is a joy to behold. It’s that both of these together give it a future. Here in Nottingham, the craft is alive and well, global pandemic be damned. This tradition of getting together, playing our games, practicing our craft, and nipping to the pub; it continues to survive. Delightfully so.

I hope it never ends.

Richard Minkley
30th July 2023

3. Notes on editorial process:

3.1. Editorial Discretion |

(taken from the project design document for the project)

A normal part of an oral history project is to edit, redact or omit information to protect a participant's personal reputation and the reputation of the community.

With preparation and clearly defined processes as to how the information will be dealt with, the interviewer can protect themselves, the interviewee and the broader community.

With this in mind, I would like to explicitly define what information I want to collect, what information I will omit and how I will omit it.

Firstly, I have outlined the key themes and questions I want to follow.

Secondly, I have explicitly defined what topics I am going to avoid and will there for edit out. Thirdly, I have defined how I will control the information to protect the community and people involved in the project.

3.2. Editorial controls

(taken from the project design document for the project)

When setting up project:

2. Clearly define the mission statement, for both interviewers and interviewees.
3. Prepare questions to be pointed and focused.

When interviewing

4. Ask for clarification of controversial points.

When transcribing:

5. Use ellipses (. . .) to omit unnecessarily vulgar language or mean spirited comments.
6. Use descriptors to indicate tone of voice and non-verbal cues.

Editing Process

7. Redact or cut out any damaging or defaming information from the audio or written versions of the oral history.
8. Give interviewees the option to review and alter their interviews in the spirit of the project.

3.3. Personal context

In august, I began being treated for depression and psychosis. This condition deteriorated peaking with a suicide attempt in January. This was exacerbated by a major depressive episode from October to January. I don't have a specific date for when the psychosis began, but its safe to stay that this has been a part of my life for a long time, and certainly before the start of the project.

I haven't seen a noticeable effect on the quality of the interviews, however i believe there must have been some influence from the psychosis interviewing and editing the process. I will include this context in the oral history document itself, to allow for this consideration to be made by those who may come to use this information.

THE INTERVIEWS

The Mississippi oral history project

Editing/reading the transcription

The transcript is made from audio interviews produced by Richard Minkley. After recording, the audio files were uploaded to otter.ai for preliminary automatic transcription, followed by the transcript being read through to correct any mistakes made through this automated process.

It should be remembered that the community this oral history examines is built around improvised comedy. This means interviews were between individuals with a sense of humour, regarding topics built around this sense of humour, and sometimes directly addressing their sense of humour. Sarcasm, jokes, and generally silliness were inevitable, and while the silliness has been transcribed, the laughter has not. As a consequence, when these conversations are transcribed to text and then read back, the silliness can, on occasion, sound like senile eccentric psychopathy. The reader is reminded that this is not the case.

This text should be accompanied by the audio files that relate to these interviews. The audio recordings are the primary record, with this transcript being a more efficient, but less accurate, record. Some interviews are separated into two or three parts, because while the interviews were recorded, the recording was stopped and started, producing different parts. Each paragraph should have a time code that relates to when it happens in the recording.

Some of the interview parts begin at 0 minutes and 0 seconds (00:00), where others may begin part way through (eg 48:53). This is a mistake made during the transcription process, where multiple parts were combined into a single audio file and uploaded to be transcribed together.

There were parts which were recorded and transcribed, but Richard Minkley used his discretion to remove small parts that he believed were inappropriate for publication.

When it came to combining all the interviews into this combined transcript, starting each interview part at 00:00 would have required to transcribe the whole interview part from the recording, as well as editing the audio again. This was not practical and so this inconsistency exists in the format of the time codes. For this, you have my apologies.

The document uses the following symbols:

[...]

Audio recorded but not intelligible.

[example]

Audio recorded and partly intelligible, but not completely. These words are a best guess at the words being used given their context.

[-]

Audio recorded but cut out for editorial reasons

1. Geoff Monk

1.1. Interview 1 of 2

a) Part 1 of 2

21st February 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, improv, performing, impro, rehearsals, venue, nottingham, performance, malt, Marilyn, rehearsing, called, Keith Johnstone, thinking, pub, games, Justin, felt, Ade, play

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Geoff Monk

Richard Minkley 00:00

Okay, so yeah, we are recording. This is Richard Minkley interviewing Geoff Monk for the improbable missions oral history pod, not podcast, documentary project, whatever. It's the 21st of February at 11:06 on 2020 on Friday, and yeah, that's the admin stuff. Hello. Um, right to begin with Jeff, it's the first question is, what is your first memory of Missimp?

Geoff Monk 00:40

That would be before Missimp came into actual name fruition. It would be going to a next stage course which there were two and they were either six or eight weeks long, every, once a week, which was hosted by Andy Barrett, the Nottingham writer and director. He directs at the Playhouse and other places and takes, goes on tour. And he was taking us through the basics of Keith Johnston's, Keith Johnson style impro. improv, whichever you prefer to call it. We enjoyed the first call so much, I think probably about 20 people turned up. I think on the second course it was whittled down a bit smaller to about 12. And eventually, we did a performance or two performances at the end of that. And we they said come up with a name for your performance. So we came up as, with, mission improbable, and that was the very first memory I have of the Missimp name being used.

Richard Minkley 01:50

Okay, so tell me more about that course. So you said it was Keith Johnstonian impro. Did they use improv or impro is a word?

Geoff Monk 02:02

Well, I think, the book says improv on the on the front cover. I can't remember without having. I don't have the brochure in front of me.

Richard Minkley 02:13

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 02:13

I think it was like, we might have used the whole word improvisation rather than, because I've still to this day, I don't know which one to use. Most people say improv around these days but occasionally hear impro and I do not object to that. That's fine if he wants to say that.

Richard Minkley 02:31

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 02:32

I like that word as well.

Richard Minkley 02:34

Okay, so what was on? So when there's a [couple.] You used the word 'we' was it that a group of you went to the course or did you as an individual go to the course?

Geoff Monk 02:44

So I went to, as an individuals to the course. So everyone who was there I'd never met before. And so it was a new bunch of friends for me, as well. Which was nice. And was the guy from New Zealand called Justin Gould, who now lives in Edinburgh and there was a chemistry teacher from Derby called Phil. There was a...

Richard Minkley 03:11

Do you remember Phil's surname?

Geoff Monk 03:13

Clark.

Richard Minkley 03:14

Phil Clark. Okay.

Geoff Monk 03:17

There was Tony. And I don't have his name, his surname handy, but I can find it out for you. And I'm still in touch with him as well. Okay. So I can look it up now but

Richard Minkley 03:28

Nah nah nah. We can look that up later.

Geoff Monk 03:30

We'll look that up later. There was a another girl from New Zealand, I think she was called Rachel.

Richard Minkley 03:44

Okay.

Geoff Monk 03:44

She and she was very like Marilyn, actually.

Richard Minkley 03:47

How was she very like Marilyn?

Geoff Monk 03:48

She looked the same. Very similar. There is a video with her in it somewhere. And, yeah, she disappeared off to London. So we never, we lost touch with her.

Richard Minkley 04:00

Okay, um, so before we go into what was on that course, what was, like where, where did, how did this come about? So you said Andy Barrett was leading the course.

Geoff Monk 04:13

Yes. He was hired by Nottinghamshire County Council to run one of these arts courses. And I did a series of arts courses. And this was I think, one of the last ones I did. The arts courses, were all these sorts of formats of over a term, over several weeks, you chose one. And there was a lot more funding for arts back in the day.

Richard Minkley 04:33

Back in the day.

Geoff Monk 04:34

And yes, they were all very popular. I did singing from scratch. I did clowning. I even did a stand up comedy one. So they were a very diverse and forward thinking styles of classes, I think they were doing.

Richard Minkley 04:48

Wow. Why did you want to go to one of those courses, if at [all]?

Geoff Monk 04:56

I was looking for something that wasn't am-dram because I felt the commitment level was strong, very, very strong for am-dram and also, I didn't like the repetiti... repetitive nature of it. So, learning a script, then rehearsing, rehearsing like crazy going over the script over and over again, finally accumulating in three nights [of], consecutively, like Thursday, Friday, Saturday, of a performance and then that was it done and dusted. That, move on to the next play.

Richard Minkley 05:28

Okay.

Geoff Monk 05:28

I didn't care for that cycle, but I liked stage time and being on stage and performing in front of people and, and the, that was, that in itself is a lovely challenge. And the idea of being with a group of like minded people, whether it's to sing or to perform, or to make people laugh. And I've seen, I saw the Comedy Store Players with Paul Merton and company, Richard Ranch and all the people that, many of the people who were on Whose Line Is It Anyway, which was one of my favorite shows at the time.

Richard Minkley 06:04

Yeah?

Geoff Monk 06:05

I thought, wouldn't it be great to do that, to be able to do that. And, lo and behold, this course, wow, there's a course actually teaching that. So that was, I think one of the only courses I've seen such run by a council, ever, and I've never seen another one. since then it's been relying on groups like ourselves and around the country and doing these kind of improvisers comedy courses.

Richard Minkley 06:31

Thats interesting. I'm going to quickly, where do you see the Comedy Store players? Were they at the Comedy Store or were they like...?

Geoff Monk 06:40

No they were at the, The Comedy Store London and also they had a weekly performance, or maybe less often in Manchester. So I saw them about three times over a period of a year or so in London, and maybe once in Manchester, maybe a couple of times in Manchester.

Richard Minkley 06:58

Okay, so what did you learn on that course? Like you said it was Keith Johnstonian.

Geoff Monk 07:03

Yes. So, based on his book impro, and his second book, improvisation for the theater. So we sort of followed that as the loose syllabus. And I think it was one of the few books around on improv. There was that one and there was another one by Del Close, I think, or...

Richard Minkley 07:26

What what? Do you remember what year this was that you took that course?

Geoff Monk 07:31

So it would be 97/98.

Richard Minkley 07:35

97/98. So was it like late 97, early 98?

Geoff Monk 07:39

Yeah, so I think it was, I'd have to benchmark when our first performance was, because that would be the, the autumn of that year? So I think there's, maybe we did the course in the spring or the summer term, and maybe we've done the spring or the autumn term before that. So I'm not sure whether it was the end of the last year or... I don't remember.

Richard Minkley 08:01

But your performance your first performance of Missimp was in the autumn of 98?

Geoff Monk 08:07

If that's what the video says, because I researched it, and put it on, timestamped the video, and it's up on YouTube with the date on it.

Richard Minkley 08:15

So wait, so there's a video of the first performance?

Geoff Monk 08:18

Yes. If fact, it might, well it might have been 99 because we celebrated 10 years, 20 years last year, didn't we, which was 2019. It was probably 99. Yes, there is a video of our first public performance. We'd done a couple of performances within the next stage projects. So that was to other people who were on other courses, and we did a showcase. So there was the singing and the comedy and various other things that people had done in a showcase.

Richard Minkley 08:45

That's interesting. Why did you video it? Because like, so like I can understand it's pretty interesting thing, and I'm overwhelmed that you've recorded it, that's amazing, but like, why did you want to record it?

Geoff Monk 08:56

I was thinking that we were going to record quite a lot of our performances, so we could watch them see how we did. But also because this was the first one. I thought we should record all of it for posterity so

Richard Minkley 09:10

Well.

Geoff Monk 09:11

yes.

Richard Minkley 09:11

It's paying off. Hurray.

Geoff Monk 09:13

Yes. Lucky i did. Yes.

Richard Minkley 09:15

So.

Geoff Monk 09:16

My wife was manning the video camera, although it was just, uh, just making sure that it was still recording and guarding it, really.

Richard Minkley 09:23

yeah, it's an important job.

Geoff Monk 09:24

Pointed in one place.

Richard Minkley 09:26

Do you remember anything about that show? not just the video but like from...?

Geoff Monk 09:30

I remember being very nervous doing it, because it was our first one. Up at the, it was also a very high up stage at the malt cross, which is also where we had our 20th anniversary, which is why it's so perfect. When when we did it last year.

Richard Minkley 09:46

Okay.

Geoff Monk 09:48

And I remember people laughing, I remember enjoying it and getting a good reaction and it was just fun to do. I think we probably came off on quite a high after that.

Richard Minkley 09:59

Thats interesting. So you did this. You did the course you did that performance. Obviously, kept going, but like, was it? What was that like that you came off the stage? At what point were you thinking of doing, were you thinking of doing more, were you thinking of doing something else? Like, Where did that?

Geoff Monk 10:22

[Right,] Well, there was encouragement from Andy Barrett, but he, I think he came to a couple more of our shows. He helped us perhaps set up a couple more shows and made suggestions. He suggested the Gladstone pub in Sherwood, which I think we did a couple of shows there. And I think he possibly came to a few more, but he pretty much said that, you know, he's can just let's us, set us free. He was the teacher and basically that his, the end of his remit. So it's up to us from now on if we want to keep it going. And I think of the seven, six or seven of us involved. Also there, was an Ade, I should have mentioned earlier.

Richard Minkley 11:07

I was gonna say, was this the list of names that you were giving me, the names of people who were in that first perform?

Geoff Monk 11:12

Yes. So Adey was in there.

Richard Minkley 11:14

Ade, is that A D E?

Geoff Monk 11:15

Yes. Again, I need to look up his last name because off the top of my head don't have it.

Richard Minkley 11:20

Okay.

Geoff Monk 11:23

And.

Richard Minkley 11:25

do you remember anybody else from that performance?

Geoff Monk 11:32

So it was Ade...

Richard Minkley 11:34

The names i've got are Justin, Phil, Tony, Rachael, Ade.

Geoff Monk 11:38

Tony, Rachael, Ade. Obviously m. I think that Tony possibly wasn't in the performance. I'm. But there was, yeah, there was at least five of us anyway.

Richard Minkley 11:48

Okay.

Geoff Monk 11:50

Need to check the performance. To check the tapes.

Richard Minkley 11:53

Okay. So how did you continue doing mission improbable?

Geoff Monk 11:57

Well, I think myself and just took on the sort of task of momentum and leadership for the group. So we were [I] think the most enthusiastic to find venues. I would design flyers and print them on a photocopier or home home computer, or we'd get a limited run done, the best we could. And, find the venues and everybody would, who lived in the center of Nottingham would put them through student letter boxes and things. There was no Facebook. There was no social media.

Richard Minkley 12:41

This is what I was thinking. So how did you go about organizing your first couple of shows?

Geoff Monk 12:44

It had to be mostly word of mouth so we relied on friends and family. Leafleting was slightly effective, but, just like, if you Facebook post today, it doesn't guarantee that people can see it or it doesn't guarantee that people are going to come. The best thing, always, today still, I think is word of mouth, so. And growing the community. So, by growing the community, you get more people interested because it is such a difficult thing to explain to people, what it is. It's comedy, but not as people know it. Everyone knows what stand up is. But try and explain what improvised comedy is. You can only say something they're familiar with, like, Whose Line Is It Anyway? And even that's getting less and less familiar because the show is getting older and older. And people, remembering it less.

Richard Minkley 13:45

Was there a community back then, or was it just...?

Geoff Monk 13:49

No, we built, we had to build a community from scratch. That was, We were the only improvised comedy group in the area. And we didn't, also we didn't have really, a way of knowing, because the internet was very basic, and, it was MySpace and things like that back then. It's not that long ago, but in terms of the internet, Facebook didn't start till 2007. So in the late 90s, beginning of the 2000s, you really had to, you weren't aware of what else was about. It was still, print media was was ruling. It was

on its way out, but the internet was still in its infancy. And not hugely popular and everyone, most people had dial up.

Richard Minkley 13:50

How many people did you get to those first couple of shows? Or do you remember how not maybe the specific number but about?

Geoff Monk 13:43

Well, I remember the the malt cross was well attended. I'm not sure how we did that. But I think it was a there was probably about 40. 40 people or so watching the show as a guess.

Richard Minkley 14:55

Did that trajectory continue? So you came on after the malt cross

Geoff Monk 14:59

Yeah. I think it was it's been very hit and miss ever since Sometimes you'd get 30 people coming to see the show. Sometimes it was five. And I think that is the same truth in improv today.

Richard Minkley 15:12

So you kind of described you've been on this course. Yeah, that's interesting. So you've been on this course you picked up these skills and sort of a bunch of people to perform with and you started doing little shows. You said you performed in in Gladstone pub. And in the malt cross, I'm assuming at this point, the malt cross was a

Geoff Monk 15:33

it was a that was a one off because the space it was so big.

Richard Minkley 15:38

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 15:38

And the stage it's more it's an old time music hall. So it's more likely that people will have live music acts there that's that's what they're known for.

Richard Minkley 15:49

So what was the malt cross like at that point? It's it's a tangential thing I'm interested in. You were in the main hall. I take it

Geoff Monk 15:55

Yes, it looks pretty much the same as it does today. The stage was a little bit slightly different. And I don't think it had any safety bars around the top of it. So it was quite high up. So yeah, it was, but otherwise it was the same and it was quite well lit. And Andy Barrett sat at desk lower down. And he was the, the, the, the host of the show, he would take the suggestions from the audience. And then he would say who's on next. And this is, and it was all short form. So we'd play all the sort of short form games that you can familiarize yourself with,

Richard Minkley 16:35

what go on what short game what short form games did you play in those days,

Geoff Monk 16:39

Accents game, advertising things from a dictionary. So people would pick a random word from the dictionary and that was always fun. Because the audience are not always great at coming to suggestions. So we said what page number in the dictionary page 327, how many lines down or how many paragraphs, third word in, or something. That would be the word we'd advertise. So one the best memory we had was advertising Andalusia which caused Phil [...] to burst into song and

Richard Minkley 17:10

What's andalusi?

Geoff Monk 17:11

Yeah, it's a region of Spain so we have to advertise Andalusia

Richard Minkley 17:19

fantastic so any other games that come to mind, accents, advertising

Geoff Monk 17:25

oh the arms through game so yeah,

Richard Minkley 17:29

So accents is where so if I'm going to double check this actually because games can sometimes change in meaning. accents is basically a bit like genre roller coaster where

Geoff Monk 17:38

yes you attempt to change accents and

Richard Minkley 17:40

Someone rings a bell and you change accents

Geoff Monk 17:42

so if you're in Sweden you start building furniture and chopping wood a little stereotypical of the of the region you're you're doing Yeah, whilst remaining respectful.

Richard Minkley 17:54

Not always the easiest thing to do in those kind of games. Well,

Geoff Monk 17:57

no, but yeah,

Richard Minkley 18:00

It's interesting because I imagine we'll come back to how the games can change, changed over time. Advertising as you said, arms through game is that basically where you're doing improv with one person with their hands behind them?

Geoff Monk 18:11

Yes. So one person is your arms are the person who's talking, has their arms around the back, the person behind you is just being your arms, and you're interacting. So they can either provide a

suggestion by changing the stance of moving their arms, they could put their put their hand on your chin, so you have to react to that. So that was a fun game that we don't see very much these days.

Richard Minkley 18:33

Yeah. And any other games that you can come up with

Geoff Monk 18:37

standing sitting lying.

Richard Minkley 18:39

That's yeah familiar one.

Geoff Monk 18:41

lots of quite a few physical games. Scenes into song. So where you have to, on cue, turn what you've just said into a song.

Richard Minkley 18:53

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 18:55

And yeah, that's I think those were core game. So we probably had probably about a one hour show or so. Remember at the time we maybe had an interval? I think we did. And maybe you've got time to play five or six games per set, something like that.

Richard Minkley 19:11

And is that the format, which you carried on

Geoff Monk 19:13

yes, we pretty much took that. And we sort of we did find lists of games to play, learn a few more. And yeah, we basically tried to we strive to be like, Whose Line Is It Anyway? type of set?

Richard Minkley 19:29

Yeah,

Geoff Monk 19:29

it's a short form I think is the most is what people understand. It's the most crowd pleasing, populist improv impro form as opposed to more long form, which is more theatrical, I think more improvised theater comedy, and everyone's got the different viewpoints on what makes it that it's all impro. its all improv but, but

Richard Minkley 19:53

what's your preference?

Geoff Monk 19:55

I like a bit of everything.

Richard Minkley 19:57

Yeah,

Geoff Monk 19:57

yes.

Richard Minkley 19:59

So We've built a sense of where Missimp came from. It's late 90s you've been on a course you've picked up these skills you like Whose Line is it Anyway and you're trying to put that show on is that's a fair way to describe it

Geoff Monk 20:13

Yeah, absolutely.

Richard Minkley 20:16

How long does that go on for?

Geoff Monk 20:18

Well,

Richard Minkley 20:19

I mean obviously 20 years but

Geoff Monk 20:21

yes

Richard Minkley 20:22

there is was that that basically a year of trying to find gigs and pubs and perform?

Geoff Monk 20:29

Well I think for at least two or three years we were performing monthly in various venues The Old Vic was another one which is on weekday cross. I think that's now ping pong and burgers something like that

Richard Minkley 20:47

Das Keno

Geoff Monk 20:48

Das Keno. Yes, I think that one

Richard Minkley 20:50

What was that like as a venue

Geoff Monk 20:52

very wide, so quite, quite shallow but very wide stage and they had the reason we like to That venue is they had stand up comedy there already every Friday and Saturday night so we would try to take a Thursday night slot or one of the quieter night slots where where they weren't that busy otherwise and the early part of the evening and then when people came in later that was that was fine

Richard Minkley 21:23

so how did you was it straightaway that you went from course malt cross show you were like yes let's do this or was it there kind of a build up towards that?

Geoff Monk 21:31

Well, we started sort of meeting every week or every couple of weeks and then every week to rehearse the techniques and so Adey found us a place on in near cunning circus was somewhere we went for a while we any any room we could get, maybe the bunkers Hill Yeah.

Richard Minkley 21:56

Bunkers Hill.

Geoff Monk 21:57

anyway, anyway, that would give us a free room. So in exchange For we bought a few drinks while we were there on a quiet night of the week, and this seemed to set the pattern for Thursday evenings being the best time for most people.

Richard Minkley 22:12

thats fascinating

Geoff Monk 22:13

Occasional weekend daytime

Richard Minkley 22:15

so was it that pattern of you kind of the rehearsals came before the show? It wasn't like like you were saying in am dram where you say we're going to put on a play. You decide what the play is and then you build the rehearsal schedule around that. You're making it sound like it was more you were rehearsing, playing the game to practicing the technique and looking for sorry, looking for pubs and opportunities to perform Is that right?

Geoff Monk 22:41

Yes.

Richard Minkley 22:42

Okay. I'm very This is going to see and you'll see when this all comes out I'm very interested in rehearsal rooms when what was the first rehearsal rooms like. you said you're in a places it like you were rehearsing in

Geoff Monk 22:55

Bunkers Hill upstairs. That was that was all right. was really, in fact, we also did some performances there because again, it was an improvised It was a comedy, stand up comedy venue some times had a slightly raised stage. So that was a good place to rehearse. And it was free. We didn't, because it was just the few of us we didn't charge each other for we didn't put the money into a pot. Basically, we just turned up, rehearse together. So it was a free hobby for us to to turn up and play together.

Richard Minkley 23:36

So those two or three years is we've got a big chunk of time there. How would you summarize them? Because we've already said, you basically spent two or three years after the course. rehearsing weekly performing monthly or

Geoff Monk 23:54

something like that. Yeah,

Richard Minkley 23:55

something like that. How do you think those two or three years went

Geoff Monk 24:01

Fast in retrospect, but I think they were. Yeah, they were challenging, but they were fun. Otherwise we wouldn't do it. We weren't thinking. This is so difficult. We were thinking, we're having fun doing this. And another venue we used was on Mansfield road. I think it's just recently announced closure. And it's a live music venue as well as sort of multi purpose venue. So its on Mansfield road near the top.

Richard Minkley 24:28

Do you remember what it was called?

Geoff Monk 24:30

And my head, it doesn't come to me either. But that was a we performed there a few times as well.

Richard Minkley 24:38

So we're in turn of the century now it's 98, 99, 2000. It feels like you've hit with, it feels like we're talking about a kind of equilibrium here where it kind of going along for two or three years.

Geoff Monk 24:55

Yes.

Richard Minkley 24:55

Was that the same group of people doing the same rehearsals

Geoff Monk 25:00

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 25:00

same format of rehearsing some games practicing and putting on a show in a in a pub.

Geoff Monk 25:05

Yeah. And at the time we were not thinking, particularly of building a community. We were thinking of just doing this and building an audience. And that was that that was the way approach we're taking thinking. If we can be regular doing this, more people will come and watch, and then we'll see what happens. We weren't, we didn't really have much of a forward plan as to how it would go, we were just having fun. If we charged people to come in, it would be a couple of quid and we get some beer money at the end.

Richard Minkley 25:39

When did that change? So we're in that equilibrium of two or three years after the thing I'm assuming now, so two or three years, so after 98, 99. 2001, 2002 what's happening in that time where this equilibrium changes or is that the right period were looking at?

Geoff Monk 26:00

Yeah, I think I won't be able to recall the exact dates or when or even years when things happened. But there's a point when one or two people left the group for like Rachel went to London. I think she probably went to London after the first year. So she didn't stay long. And, and then maybe two or three years in, Phil Clark left the group. He was extremely valuable member of the team and he was very, very good. But we just said, Oh, it'd be really nice if you can, if you could come to more rehearsals because he would just start. He was good. He was good. So he would just tend to turn up for the shows and hardly ever come to rehearsals. When we remarked about this and he sort of lost interest and we I'm sure we didn't ask him to leave But he left of his own volition because we kind of said, please come to the rehearsals, because we're working with the rehearsals, and it would help help us more help the team gel more to be in the show.

Richard Minkley 27:14

That's interesting, because there's a sense that you've just used the word team. Is that how you guys, Because you've also described it as just a hobby. It's just fun. But that idea of being a team, is that something that was there from the very beginning or did that kind of grow? The more you did it?

Geoff Monk 27:31

Because I think the most of the people on the course didn't continue with it was only like, six or seven of us that continued. I think we were automatically there was the feeling that we could all be in the show. Anybody who wants to be on the show, we'd all done the course. Everyone was good enough to be in the show. We weren't looking for excellence in Keith Johnson's words. If you want to be great well Good, just be aim for average. That's because you will automatically if you're not trying trying too hard, you will do a good job just by going out there enjoying yourself and not thinking about trying to, first of all, as we say, never tried to make people laugh, never tried to do gags or try to be funny. Just play to your highest intelligence but not actually make it hard for yourself. Just enjoy yourself. respond to the moment

Richard Minkley 28:35

was that there from the very beginning that sense of be average because I heard Keith Johnston described that as well as it you know, people don't try too hard. Be average. It was that there from the beginning.

Geoff Monk 28:46

I don't think the words be average were used. Because I think I say to that people to see, I mentioned that to people now. In terms of if I'm teaching somebody. Don't try too hard to do your best. I don't say just, I probably say don't say, I think I might quote Keith Johnson saying be average but say well, just go out there and enjoy yourself. Play, enjoy the play. And if the audience see you're enjoying yourself, you'll enjoy it more because they'll enjoy it more. That's my philosophy on improv in general. improv. improv.

Richard Minkley 29:26

It's your your philosophy is more try to enjoy it than try to perform, well. That's if. these these feels like strange contradictions when it comes to improv. You don't hear people in theater saying Oh your Hamlet, but just try to enjoy yourself. But

Geoff Monk 29:44

yeah,

Richard Minkley 29:44

what would you say your philosophy of improv is

Geoff Monk 29:47

I think once the tech once you've got the basic techniques down and learn some of the quoted, inverted commas rules, you can discard the rules. Because you will do the right thing most of the time automatically, occasionally even the most experienced people will break a rule, and it'll either work or it won't. But, yeah, my philosophy is we're doing this for fun to enjoy ourselves. If we're trying to do it to get paid, then we wouldn't we'd be all be very poor. I think most of us anyway.

Richard Minkley 30:29

Some people would argue that we are very poor. That's a different issue.

Geoff Monk 30:33

be even poorer.

Richard Minkley 30:35

Yeah. So we've kind of gone so yeah, we're in, people are leaving.

Geoff Monk 30:44

Yes

Richard Minkley 30:44

You still keeping up that schedule of rehearsing regularly and

Geoff Monk 30:47

yes

Richard Minkley 30:48

performing monthly.

Geoff Monk 30:49

But once once it's getting down to only four or five people turning up for rehearsals, we're thinking, Well, how do we replace these people are leaving we're gonna they didn't do the course. One or two people have heard about it and we've had one or two people join us. But on the whole, the trend is downward. So Justin and myself put out some sort of advertisement. And I can't remember what medium we used. I think it might have been internet based. And we had Marilyn Bird and Clayton Fussell turn up and meet us in a bar. I think it was. The pitcher, not it wasn't Pitcher and piano. It was that magpie and crow or something. The the one that's behind the council house that's a bit Gothic bar like

Richard Minkley 31:44

oh, pit and pendulum him.

Geoff Monk 31:45

Yes. I think it might have been there. I don't remember exactly.

Richard Minkley 31:49

Okay. What was Clayton's surname

Geoff Monk 31:51

Fussell,

Richard Minkley 31:52

Fussell?

Geoff Monk 31:53

F U S S E L

Richard Minkley 31:56

possibly another L,

Geoff Monk 31:58

possibly another L. one L or two. I'm not sure

Richard Minkley 32:01

Just to pick you up, you said that was the trend is downwards? Is that just in terms of people performing and coming to rehearsals? Or did you feel there was a trajectory downwards of the audience as well?

Geoff Monk 32:14

No, I think that the audience is always going. There's always been the same up and down, hit and Miss. But I think you can only rely on family and friends for so long. There'll be loyal family and friends who will always come to see you. And then there are the transit audience, the transient audience of the mainstream who just happen to hear about it. They're more fickle, because once they've seen the show, once or twice, they've seen the format, even though it's always different, the format is similar. So you've got to keep them interested.

Richard Minkley 32:53

So Marilyn and Clayton, what year did you Do you remember around about what point they turned up?

Geoff Monk 33:06

I think I'm gonna guess about four or five

Richard Minkley 33:13

or five. So

Geoff Monk 33:15

I think it was about five years into the group that ultimately Nick and Marilyn came along who have been a big driving force for the future.

Richard Minkley 33:28

So do you remember anything about that evening where

Geoff Monk 33:33

Marilyn

Richard Minkley 33:33

The team was dwindling and then Marilyn and Clayton,

Geoff Monk 33:36

they both came along, presenting themselves as actors interested in improv? I think I advertised this as possibly a earning opportunity, a low earning opportunity. I hadn't, hadn't sort of said this was going to be a money spin up but I said, Justin and I sat down we discussed this with them. And we said it's, it's an opportunity to earn some beer money while performing and practicing your skills of acting and improvisation.

Richard Minkley 34:12

So when you say earn some beer money, what does that mean in practice? And I'm aware that this is,

Geoff Monk 34:20

well, any money we earned at the end of the night we just divvy up and we'd keep some to for the next print run of, of brochures or photocopying. So we'd have a very small float in the kitty. between £50 and £100 I think would be kept in a kitty for printing. The we made sure the venue's didn't want any money because that's the hardest part of finding a venue is they almost want a guarantee for the bar of how many audience you're going to get. And I think that remains the case today.

Richard Minkley 34:54

Which is tricky

Geoff Monk 34:55

Yes.

Richard Minkley 34:56

And then you would say you would have as long as you've got about 100 pounds in the float you would watch split the money evenly or

Geoff Monk 35:01

pretty. Yeah, pretty evenly. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 35:04

Okay, you say pretty evenly was there.

Geoff Monk 35:06

I know that we didn't say that. Even though Justin and I were running at the time, we didn't keep any more money than anybody else.

Richard Minkley 35:14

Okay,

Geoff Monk 35:14

so I think maybe I can't remember exactly. But we might ended up buying, theres was so little money coming in anyway, it was maybe, let's say 30 to 40 pounds we might get from from the evening. So by the time you've bought everybody one drink, then there'll be maybe 20 pounds left in for the kitty,

Richard Minkley 35:34

I see

Geoff Monk 35:35

or nothing.

Richard Minkley 35:36

So sometimes everyone gets a drink, and then whatever's left gets kind of put in the pot.

Geoff Monk 35:42

I think we always got a drink. I think we always had enough to have a drink. Yes.

Richard Minkley 35:46

That's a pretty good success marker. In terms of if you're just there for fun being able to pay for your drinks. That works quite well.

Geoff Monk 35:51

Yeah. I think it was two or three pounds to see us or something like that.

Richard Minkley 35:55

So you and Justin were still leading the it was Justin Gould

Geoff Monk 36:00

Yes, we were we were leading the group in terms of

Richard Minkley 36:09

can i, in fact, i'm sorry carry on.

Geoff Monk 36:11

be motivational and doing the legwork of finding the gig and deciding the running order. I think I think that was my role. There was no other administration. There was no other formal structure.

Richard Minkley 36:27

So, tell me about Justin because I don't know of him. However, I'm gonna ask, Is he a biology teacher?

Geoff Monk 36:33

No,

Richard Minkley 36:34

no, I'm thinking of someone else.

Geoff Monk 36:35

he's a he's a kiwi.

Richard Minkley 36:37

Ah

Geoff Monk 36:37

and he had British citizenship because he's, I think he's one of his parents was originally British for some reason, or is I can't remember which one. So he is. Yeah. So he moved. He was living here permanently from New Zealand and had learnt had done improv a little bit at School maybe.

Richard Minkley 37:07

Okay, so how did we're in somewhere between 2003 and 2005. Marilyn and Clayton have, you've met them? They were sort of actors looking for opportunities. And I believe that

Geoff Monk 37:21

Yep.

Richard Minkley 37:21

Would you say that's how it's been described?

Geoff Monk 37:22

Yes.

Richard Minkley 37:23

I'm also aware that you were an actor in some ways where you

Geoff Monk 37:27

Yeah, I mean, I I'm still an actor in the sense that I do. I will take professional work as well as do background work. So in terms of actors who are only actors who will only take acting roles. I'm not in the in that class I'm in the I will take acting roles when they if they come along, but they tend to be like a walk on with a couple of lines. or corporate role play is another thing i do. And but it's mainly TV extra background work. So walking in the background, anybody can do that.

Richard Minkley 38:12

So were you considering yourself looking for acting work during this time? Because I'm interested in whether or not the improv came first or the acting came first for you.

Geoff Monk 38:26

The acting came first I I did have a successful TV role when I was 14, 15 on an ITV drama.

Richard Minkley 38:34

What I'm sorry I had no idea about this. What was your

Geoff Monk 38:37

I play played a guy called Mark moss in Episode Seven of a series called heartland and it was a series of plays set in the Midlands, this one was set in Nottingham. It was screened on primetime ITV with a decent cast of people and I had quite a quite a big speaking part. So it was one of the main parts and it's it's also on YouTube [-]. And interesting that I get a lot of messages on my on the YouTube posts saying this series was great and it's date should be released on DVD. write right to network and

because there's lots of nostalgia for those kind of things that were and it wasn't good series of the of the 1980s. So

Richard Minkley 39:20

I'm gonna find that play

Geoff Monk 39:21

It was actually made in 79. It was shown in beginning of 1980. And yeah, so it's 40 years old this year.

Richard Minkley 39:30

That's incredible. 40 years old, and this is about 20 years old as

Geoff Monk 39:33

15 when I did it,

Richard Minkley 39:35

I just want to see you age 15. It's gonna be amazing. Anyway, back to the matter at hand. So we've kind of in about 40 minutes, we've covered about six years. It's somewhere between 2003 and 2005. At the minute, how did Marilyn and Clayton joining the team change anything or did it change anything?

Geoff Monk 40:00

Well, we certainly needed I think we needed a female in the group I felt for one and Marilyn provided a new element there because Rachel has left. I think we had another woman in the group who I'm afraid I can't remember off the top of my head. What the name is, and you should speak to Justin he lives in Edinburgh now and I'm sure you can have a Skype chat with him and he can provide you quite a lot of valuable background as well.

Richard Minkley 40:32

Did you feel so you felt the need to have a female presence but he will also felt like you needed more players generally. What happened to Missimp? Were you, sorry, were you still mission improbable?

Geoff Monk 40:44

Yes, we were. Yes.

Richard Minkley 40:46

So did it continue with regular rehearsals and monthly performances?

Geoff Monk 40:51

Yeah, something like that. So we will perform wherever we could. So having new members provided a new impetus And that's how I think we all got on and Nick Tyler was at that time Marilyn's boyfriend and like they still, they still are partners together. And he was very much taking a back seat at the beginning. He was just coming along. And I hope he doesn't mind me saying this, but he was. He seemed very shy at the time, actually. And he would sit and watch and take notes.

Richard Minkley 41:33

Take notes.

Geoff Monk 41:33

So he come to rehearsals, and he would come to shows because his girlfriend was the one that was performing. So he was just watching and taking notes. But gradually, he did start to come to rehearsals and start to get involved.

Richard Minkley 41:50

Okay. And was that in how quickly did that transition happen? Do you reckon in terms of him getting dragged into performing

Geoff Monk 41:59

well I would guess within a few months he was more involved in was actually taking an active role in rehearsing and learning all the techniques. He had done some before, I think at university because Nick and Marilyn were at university together I believe so he was certainly getting involved and we were also going to each other's houses and practicing there as well and when we couldn't get a room,

Richard Minkley 42:25

okay, so I kind of just need to summarize some of the information we've just gone over mainly, where you were performing and rehearsing. So was it like you had a residency where you could, you agreed with, for example, a pub you would do every Thursday night for a given period of time? Did you have a deal whereby you have to every month figure out what were we going to perform next? Was there like stretches that you have?

Geoff Monk 42:55

I think we got the Old Vic for a while that was quite I think we had a good Few months there, and then we we lost that one for some reason. Then we had two gigs in a place called seven at canning circus. much larger hall than we would have liked. It was it was ridiculous and

Richard Minkley 43:18

tell me more about performing at seven.

Geoff Monk 43:19

we clearly. We could we clearly couldn't fill it there was the the manager was wanting 50 people minimum to get the bar sales even though it was a quiet night. We were getting small audiences of 20 to 30. And she wasn't prepared to stay with us while we try to build this up because it's okay. It's all very well getting to a venue for a couple of gigs but pre internet you couldn't promote it if you weren't there for very long. So it was chicken and egg.

Richard Minkley 43:56

Right.

Geoff Monk 43:56

We hadn't got a big following because there wasn't a Big community. So yes, we did a couple of gigs at seven and they were they were fine, but then we had to find somewhere else again, so we have to keep finding new gigs occasionally.

Richard Minkley 44:15

Did you have any more

Geoff Monk 44:16

bunker, bunkers Hill was a good place. The Old Vic was a good place and two or three times at that venue on Mansfield road. I can't recall the name off the top of my head.

Richard Minkley 44:26

We'll see if

Geoff Monk 44:27

The maze got it

Richard Minkley 44:28

the maze?

Geoff Monk 44:28

the maze. Yes. Yeah,

Richard Minkley 44:30

okay. Why? Okay, so we kind of coming to the end of a certain chapter, it feels. Why did you keep sticking out improvised comedy in Nottingham? Since 1998. To what 2005 2006? because you've described it as a very, you know, small there wasn't community, you didn't necessarily get great amount of support from pubs. Is that fair to say?

Geoff Monk 45:06

Well, I think as an improviser, you got to be very optimistic.

Richard Minkley 45:10

Yeah?

Geoff Monk 45:10

And we were optimistic that there would be a breakthrough in the community that improv will become more mainstream that that channel four would make it more popular by having more improvised type shows. And so we were hopeful that maybe we might be learning new techniques and becoming good enough to be television performers in the future where though we could be those those players on shows like who's line is it anyway. Whether it happened or not, we're still enjoying what we're doing in Nottingham, so it didn't really matter. But that would have been nice. But

Richard Minkley 45:50

so why

Geoff Monk 45:52

Its still not the case but channel, whatever channel, there's more, more and more TV channels but impro improv is still not mainstream. It's it's hidden beneath formats, we should call something else. I Think the latest thing I keep keep seeing advertised is hypothetical on Dave. Comedians thinking off the top of their heads, but it's not improvisers it's well known Comedians who've got to think off the top of their heads.

Richard Minkley 46:23

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 46:24

And so, yeah, improv is still being pushed below the surface. Because I think what I've heard people say, well, Channel Four have done improv. They did whose lies it anyway. So that's it. That shows [...]

Richard Minkley 46:40

it only raises the question even more that you've been doing this for, like even after two years. You're You're hopeful. you're three years you're hopeful and you're describing how, you know, other channels are pushing improv below the waterline, but you guys kept doing it. So,

Geoff Monk 47:01

because it's because it's fun. And it's always it's never the same so and you're playing with with friends so we're adults who have learned to play a bit like children again, that's that's the sort of thing about that, that improv is described to new people coming to improv as that when we're a child, we know how to play as we grow up to an adult, we forget how to play, and we teach adults to play again like children just enjoy playing.

Richard Minkley 47:36

So is that I suppose as a final question for this first part of the interview, what do you feel you got from those first five years worth of improvised performing? personally?

Geoff Monk 47:50

I think I just got also fun out of it. in a nutshell and my new friends new experiences and learnt yeah learnt more techniques. There wasn't more courses you could do back in those days we we were the performers and our own course we had to learn what we could from what we've seen. So in a sense, we, we probably got we got better but we didn't advance and change very much. I would say in those days.

Richard Minkley 48:25

Well, let's put didn't change or advance very much. We're going to put our finger on that statement. We're going to come back to it in about 15 minutes. I'm going to hit...

b) Part 2 of 2

21st February 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, nottingham, arts theatre, improv, workshops, space, theater, community, arts, pub, nick, felt, audience, running, big, rehearsals, bit, perform, night, stage

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Geoff Monk

Richard Minkley 00:00

I think I just caught the tail end of you eating your biscuit. Okay, so it is 11 minutes past 12 on Friday the 21st of February 2020. I'm here Richard Minkley interviewing Geoff Monk house. This is the second part of our interview

Geoff Monk 00:15

no, not Geoff Monk house.

Richard Minkley 00:16

Who's Geoff Monk house?

Geoff Monk 00:18

theres no such person.

Richard Minkley 00:19

Why did I say Jeff Monk house?

Geoff Monk 00:21

Well theres Rodger monk house counts as a stand up comedian?

Richard Minkley 00:24

I'm interviewing Geoff Monk in a house. Yeah, so something that I haven't picked up on it for that time. 2000 and , no, 98 to 2006. Were you What was your job? If you're happy to?

Geoff Monk 00:41

Yeah, sure. So in from 1990, I came back from a working holiday in Australia. I thought, well, that looks like a good thing to do. Pizza delivery is very popular out there. So I set up, i refurbished premises and turned into a pizza delivery shop. I've been doing that since 1990. So I'd already been doing it for about eight years when I started in improv because I was thinking, there's more to life than delivering pizzas. And

Richard Minkley 01:14

so you made it and this is fascinating. You used to own a pizza, A pizza takeaway Basically.

Geoff Monk 01:19

Yes. Yes.

Richard Minkley 01:21

What was it called?

Geoff Monk 01:21

Pizza station in Mansfield

Richard Minkley 01:24

Pizza station in Mansfield. And were you living in Mansfield at the time?

Geoff Monk 01:27

Yes, I lived above the shop. I moved from Ravenshead to live above the shop.

Richard Minkley 01:34

If I'm alright to ask and this is a little bit outside the project, but not entirely. Why did you choose to come to Nottingham?

Geoff Monk 01:41

Well, I went to school in Nottingham. I lived in I grew up in Ravenshead, which is near Mansfield, but I always went to school in Nottingham. So Nottingham was the place I knew really well. It was 20 minutes. Drive at the time. It's now half an hour. Thanks to congestion But it was about heart. It's about during this half an hour to get into Nottingham from Ravenshead, and that was there's a lot more going on than Mansfield which was an ex mining town, which didn't have an art scene at all, particularly. It had a civic theater. But yeah, I thought was a manageable size town to set a business in, but not one I wanted to go out and play in.

Richard Minkley 02:26

That's interesting. And Nottingham was the kind of place where you you would like to go and play in?

Geoff Monk 02:31

Yes, it had theaters Cinemas much more pubs and bars than a huge, much bigger catchment population. So and courses like the one I did, so, yeah, it was it's, it was my was my place of preference to go to play.

Richard Minkley 02:47

It's interesting. I forgot to ask you this, and it's very important. I do. Where did you do the course?

Geoff Monk 02:53

Oh, the College Street Art Center. It was called at the time It's just up the street from the Playhouse. It's now College Street. I think it's still a rentable spaces. I'm not sure what

Richard Minkley 03:11

Is it the community center that's up the road from the Playhouse.

Geoff Monk 03:14

Probably yes.

Richard Minkley 03:15

Okay.

Geoff Monk 03:15

Probably as a community center still so I don't know if it still counts alone but the time. Yeah, it was a center.

Richard Minkley 03:22

And you did that with it. It's interesting because you said it was with the County Council, but it's in a city bound.

Geoff Monk 03:26

Yes. Which is which is really interesting. Not It was called Nottinghamshire next stage. And maybe they had maybe they had a Newark section as well, but it was run by Nottinghamshire County Council rather than the City Council.

Richard Minkley 03:38

I'm going to quickly adjust your microphone there amazing. Okay, so we are, to jump back to where we were in in the chronology. It's around about 2005 Marilyn has joined With a guy called Clayton, and after a couple of months, Nick, her boyfriend joins in.

Geoff Monk 04:08

And this time we're now rehearsing at the Nottingham Arts Theatre in Hockley just off Broadway.

Richard Minkley 04:16

What was it like to? What was it? Like? Hang on a minute. So when did you move into that space? Because it's a bit it's more of a theater, or at least,

Geoff Monk 04:27

yeah,

Richard Minkley 04:27

part of it is,

Geoff Monk 04:28

uh, well, we found that we couldn't always get the the and This is still a problem today. You can't always get free space. So we moved into the we wanted a space that we could rely on. And we could book out. And sometimes we actually we were charged for that because they hadn't checked the diaries and we clashed with somebody who was paying for to hire the whole theater. But more or less, we perform, we perform, we rehearse there. Every week on a Thursday, that was our room. And we we had to start paying for the space I think so we then started collecting a small subscription of one or two pounds which would then pay for the room.

Richard Minkley 05:17

So why did you why how? Why did you go to the arts theater? So it was that you? You couldn't get into the normal.

Geoff Monk 05:30

I think I just

Richard Minkley 05:30

pub spaces. Like it is like there's a big jump between Oh, we'll have some fun doing it for free in public spaces to let's chip in and go to the arts theater.

Geoff Monk 05:39

Yes, I think the if I remember rightly pub spaces were inconsistently available. And Thursday evenings was a preferred night. We did actually a lot of rehearsals in Justin Gould house and thanks to the patience and corporation of his housemate. That was in Sherwood Or just off sherwood rise actually. So we were there for a while. Good, I think a good year or so we will. That's coming back to me now that we rehearse regularly in his house.

Richard Minkley 06:13

Do you remember which year it was?

Geoff Monk 06:15

No, Justin might because there's some point it just move to Edinburgh.

Richard Minkley 06:19

Ah, so was it you were in his house until he moved to Edinburgh?

Geoff Monk 06:23

I think so. Yes.

Richard Minkley 06:24

That must have been a big change. So, okay, so, which happened first moving into the Playhouse or moving Justin moving away? Not the Playhouse the arts theatre

Geoff Monk 06:37

I think we probably went to the Arts Theatre first. Because we somehow I believe we were getting more occasional people. So when we did a show, we invited people to come along and workshop with us or play with us. And I think we were starting to get a few more people in so I think it was still Facebook not working yet. It was 2007 Facebook came on but We were perhaps using email as a method to communicate or some we had some internet presence. I think I'd maybe bought the website domain by then. So I bought Missimp.co.uk. It was I think we just chose Missimp.co.UK because mission improbable.co.uk was difficult to spell and very long. So we shortened it just purely to by the website domain name, I think.

Richard Minkley 07:26

And is that why the abbreviated form came into existence?

Geoff Monk 07:30

Yes.

Richard Minkley 07:31

Now, is kind of interesting and also disappointing.

Geoff Monk 07:34

That's Well, that's what I believe. I think it was because the domain name and it wasn't it was possibly in the offing that we would you adopt that name, but it hadn't been completely decided yet. So I don't think

Richard Minkley 07:49

okay,

Geoff Monk 07:49

but we just thought that's easier to buy that short domain name than a long one.

Richard Minkley 07:55

So we're in pre Facebook pre Facebook days, you said that a couple More people started coming along because you started doing workshops with people. When did

Geoff Monk 08:06

i think it was just a jam drop in so we carried on doing what we're doing on rehearsing the techniques playing with the games. We weren't running any formal courses. We were just doing workshops slash jams.

Richard Minkley 08:18

When did the jams begin?

Geoff Monk 08:22

Right. I think they kind of evolved from. they We're always just workshop slash gems. And it depends how you define a jam as to when

Richard Minkley 08:37

we're gonna split this into into two questions. When did you start doing the workshops? Because was it so was it after Marilyn and Nick came and Clayton came along? Was it before then?

Geoff Monk 08:50

I think it was later than that

Richard Minkley 08:51

later.

Geoff Monk 08:52

So it was more it was just rehearsals for the performers.

Richard Minkley 08:57

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 08:57

And then it was Yeah, I guess we'll have to call them workshops. But that we were also rehearsing at the same time. So perhaps we got to the point where we didn't need to rehearse our games anymore. We got a repertoire of games that we were confident to play. So we began to explore more games and the idea of perhaps of starting to train other people to to join us as well.

Richard Minkley 09:26

Where did that idea of training more people come from? Was that

Geoff Monk 09:29

I think it was organic and just happened naturally.

Richard Minkley 09:33

Did you need more people or were you hoping to grow

Geoff Monk 09:37

I think a bit of both I think we a we needed more people because people would leave the team. If they've done it for two or three years, they will as it is today, people people's lives change people move on they moved to London they move to Edinburgh Clayton moved to London at some point and I'm now in touch with him again because he lives just 25 miles from me. So we're, we've met up to three times fairly recently and we're going to do some improv together in the spring.

Richard Minkley 10:10

oh thats delightful

Geoff Monk 10:10

Full Circle. Yeah. So he lives in Plymstock in Plymouth area. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 10:19

So. Sorry I'm gonna bring this back into that time frame, because I'm very interested. Why. do you remember whose decision or who first floated the idea of having a workshop element or

Geoff Monk 10:35

no I don't remember whose decision It was

Richard Minkley 10:37

that is an acceptable answer, by the way

Geoff Monk 10:39

I think it just happened organically.

Richard Minkley 10:41

Okay.

Geoff Monk 10:41

In my opinion,

Richard Minkley 10:43

What was the effect of doing more workshops? I'm assuming these workshops are in this current stage is in the pubs that you were doing, like where you could find space or Justin's house?

Geoff Monk 10:52

Yeah, well, I think we pulled it along for a while in the for at least two years in the upstairs space. Maybe three years is This upstairs space above the Arts Theatre. It had holes in the floor holes in the ceiling. It was

Richard Minkley 11:06

what was that space like?

Geoff Monk 11:08

It was a nice it was spacious, but there was there was some element of health and safety danger to it, i think

Richard Minkley 11:16

What was the element. So there was holes in the floor holes in the ceilings.

Geoff Monk 11:19

Yeah, not big holes you can fall through. But once you could put your foot through if you weren't careful, there's only one or two of them. But Marilyn has always been very health and safety conscious. So I think she's got something to say about that space.

Richard Minkley 11:32

But how was it to? Because you said you were there for about a year or two

Geoff Monk 11:36

maybe maybe three? I can't remember exactly. But I'll tell you what the trigger was for the for the next move. And

Richard Minkley 11:43

before we get I'm just gonna

Geoff Monk 11:44

in a minute when you're ready.

Richard Minkley 11:46

I'm going to explore a little bit about that. That was, yeah, it was upstairs at the Arts Theatre. How did your time at the arts theater differ from your time looking in pubs, looking in spare rooms above pubs or in people's flats or in homes?

Geoff Monk 12:06

Well, I think

Richard Minkley 12:06

Whats the difference?

Geoff Monk 12:06

my hope at the time, which we discussed, i think was that the arts theater had their own mailing list, and they did high quality am dram. And we thought that if we could convince them that we were not just wanting to play around in their rooms and rehearse that we could actually put on a show and this would always be my pitch to an am dram Theatre Company. And yet they never take us up on it for some reason. And my pitch would be well, you actually have a you rehearse for months. You do learn scripts, you recruit cast, you put on a show, you pay the publisher, an enormous amount who publishes the play, to for a license to perform that show. Why don't you Why doesn't the cast have a go Learning the technique of improv, we put on an improv show for which you can charge a similar amount of money to your play, and raise a lot of money for your theater because you, you don't have to pay the license fee. We thought we could tap into their mailing list, and they would promote us and help us out there. We're not looking for money for ourselves. We were thinking we could help the theater but also get a free space to perform and get more people get more. We that was the idea we could perhaps grow the improv community that way.

Richard Minkley 13:34

But it didn't.

Geoff Monk 13:35

It didn't happen. No,

Richard Minkley 13:36

did they give you a reason or what it just didn't happen.

Geoff Monk 13:40

We've pitched this a number of times, I think and I think we probably haven't tried very hard to pitch that but they have committees these am dram groups. Am Dram is an older persons activity. Mostly. there are younger people in these theaters they have Youth Theatre companies as well. Well, but it tends to be the people running it tend to be of a philosophy of No, we are theater that performs scripted work. And that is our remit

Richard Minkley 14:13

slightly stuck in the mud I think Looks down on improv basically,

Geoff Monk 14:17

I would I? Yeah, possibly, possibly. Or they think Oh, yes, that's nice, but it's not for us. Okay. I don't know that's, we'd have to speak to some people from an am dram theatre. We're getting sidelined.

Richard Minkley 14:30

Well, this. Well, there aren't many am dram theater in the nottingham area. So I already have two names, but you know what, yeah, I'm gonna try it. Did you try pitching it to both the Arts Theatre and the lace market theater?

Geoff Monk 14:45

Yes, we spoke to the lace market theater as well. And I said, Well, you don't even need to if there's something going on. You don't even need to use, remove your set. We can use the set thats already being painted. And they said, no no, every night's being used the way we rehearse you Got youth theater and we're painting and building sets. So there's no room for anybody else in here. So,

Richard Minkley 15:06

okay. Anyway, back to so you're in the arts theater. It's interesting. It's pre Facebook. So we're in about this period. Is it 2005 to 2007?

Geoff Monk 15:18

yes

Richard Minkley 15:18

Somewhere in there, you start using the Arts Theatre?

Geoff Monk 15:23

I'm, I don't know, I don't want to pin that down to dates. Maybe we can.

Richard Minkley 15:27

We can have a search somewhere.

Geoff Monk 15:29

Yes, we can find that out,

Richard Minkley 15:30

but you were rehearsing there and holding workshops there.

Geoff Monk 15:33

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 15:36

Because we were talking about the difference between how that period worked at the arts theater, and how the period before there worked. It's interesting, and you mentioned waiting lists, not waiting lists, mailing lists. How because that I imagine is is like there's almost like a technological thing there. Yeah, like Facebook where actually they've got access to something that could really help

Geoff Monk 16:00

Yeah, I mean, I don't think people a lot of people were using email then. I mean, they probably were but they weren't. It wasn't being heavily used for marketing. I think Facebook over took that in time, but certainly the the mid 90s or sorry the early 2000s onwards, yeah, email marketing was was taking place. But probably only a quarter of our audience might have had an email address at that time.

Richard Minkley 16:30

wow thats fascinating

Geoff Monk 16:31

I don't know I think is something we tried to gather email addresses and use that. It's a bit dim and distant past but we were getting audiences to come and see us. But we were rehearsing, we were performing less I would say at the time we were doing workshops, the workshops themselves were enjoyable. We also did a couple of festivals and we did Buxton and Bakewell festival. And also, Ross Parish joined us and joined the group at around that time. As well he was with us for a while he was the biology teacher

Richard Minkley 17:02

I was about to say is this Ross Parish of Parish production massage

Geoff Monk 17:07

Parish monk production

Richard Minkley 17:08

parish monks productions.

Geoff Monk 17:09

Yes, we did some comic comic educational videos, which are also online. You can see

Richard Minkley 17:17

I have watched the Mendel rap video

Geoff Monk 17:20

Yes

Richard Minkley 17:21

a number of times recently. It's quite good. Mainly because I want to see Nick doing the running man but thats a Completely different issued Okay, so that's, that's fascinating. How do you I'm still fascinated between the changes between because I'm beginning to see a pattern here where you go from doing just pubs, to doing just pubs monthly shows, trying to bring people along, try to build something up but you could never get in anywhere long enough to get roots and really build up something. Things are changing in this story of Missimp now, you're dealing with With a theatre space, you are going to festivals, you're doing workshops. It's hard because we're dealing with big periods of time. but do you remember why these changes were happening?

Geoff Monk 18:17

I think just organic and just from experience of what we want, what the group what the group of us wanted out of it. And I, I see the turning point for transition to modern Missimp as a I'm going to give credit to somebody else who actually was a ki another kiwi, who moved to New Zealand. We were We were fairly we were in this upstairs room at the arts theatre. And suddenly we just heard about another improv group in Nottingham, I thought. What was that about? A guy called [...] guy called Jeff or Jif as we called him, if you pronounce it in Kiwi had started improv workshops on another it might have been the Tuesday night or something. And he was doing it nottingham arts. Sorry, Nottingham. It was a venue near the train station, which is now a rambling antiques and vintage shops.

Richard Minkley 19:21

this is Hopkinsons gallery.

Geoff Monk 19:21

Yes it is. So it's Hopkinson's Gallery. But at the time, it was all open space downstairs and workshop spaces for artists and rehearsals upstairs. So we had they had the downstairs space for rehearsing in and doing workshops in and, and they also wanted to do some performances. So I think they went on for maybe a few months to a year. And we had some, a little bit of cross collaboration. I thought while we took a look at their space, and how much they were paying for space and it was a nicer space than we had. And we said, well, as soon as Thursday's becomes available because we wanted to stick to

Thursdays, it had become our set pattern day of the week. If Thursday's becomes available as a regular space, we'd like to book that space every week, because that's something that we wanted to have was a space we could rely on and then it began to be that the Nottingham Arts Theatre lets us down so many times with double booking on average of five or six times a year, where would say if they remember to let us know in advance. Sometimes we'd just turn up and we'd have to then spontaneously go to a nearby downstairs room that we could just blag our way into and it would delay our rehearsals by 20 minutes while we do remember what room was by any chance? Well, one time we blagged a room at the Broadway cinema

Richard Minkley 20:52

okay.

Geoff Monk 20:53

And yeah, they just kindly just let us have it. Another one is downstairs at Rosie Lee's opposite.

Richard Minkley 21:02

Yes.

Geoff Monk 21:03

Which I think is still there. But we yeah we had to blag spaces occasionally, or whatever we could find. And sometimes we just end up going to the pub because we couldn't find anyone.

Richard Minkley 21:11

That's fascinating. So tell me more about Kiwi Geoff. You found that another improv group was performing in Nottingham? Do you remember the moment where you were like, heard that there was someone else doing improv in Nottingham?

Geoff Monk 21:25

But yeah, so I think we were a mixture of delight and surprise. And so I think we went along made contact, and I think the big there was some crossover. Some people will start to go to both maybe, but not after not very long time. Jeff said he was going back to New Zealand and the group was going to fold. nobody seemed to want to completely run it. I think maybe Charlotte Matheson would run it for a while. She was another Kiwi. Excuse me, and she Now lives up in the Glasgow area now maybe not that it's I think it's greater Glasgow not near Glasgow itself but so she's another person worth contacting and having a chat about those middle years of Missimp. But the benefits of going to this venue was not only was a nice place to rehearse, with plenty of space to move around. But it turned out to be a lovely venue for shows. And for a good couple of years, we had a Friday night space that we could do monthly shows in and they were very successful. They were very well attended. And they were the most fun show shows in Missimp's history, in my opinion, until recently. they were magical. We we bought lighting and curtains with the funds we've got in our in our thing, which we'd have the lighting stayed up. It was on on the ceiling, we had a dimmer pack and cables for that which we brought out when needed.

Richard Minkley 23:07

So you

Geoff Monk 23:08

it went for it went quite professional for a while in terms of presentation we had we used their staging, we put up blackout curtains, we were able to produce a very nice looking show that was well lit and well attended and the one of the big attractions was BYO. So people would bring their own alcohol,

Richard Minkley 23:31

bring your own

Geoff Monk 23:32

the audience, and we were regularly getting 40 or 50 audience and it was a warm crowd with a good loyal following. So they would come regularly and I think by then we Facebook was had started but it wasn't kicked in big time. But so we were getting good word of mouth and people who were coming to other people were coming to us the art center would pick up a leaflet and we continue the leafletting. We used to meet at the Broadway maybe the Saturday before, to just talk about the format for the show and who's going to who is going to be in that particular show. And pretty much everybody who wants to be would get a turn. So you wouldn't be in the show every month, but you might do technical or you might help out on the door and things like that. And that's the I think that's when the community was properly born.

Richard Minkley 24:24

So that there there's so many things I need to ask about this. So do you remember what the name of the other community was? Or if it had a name? nitwits nitwits?

Geoff Monk 24:36

Yes. Nottingham improv troupe

Richard Minkley 24:41

wits. Wits. Yes.

Geoff Monk 24:44

Something like that. They were the nitwits. I think they've taken the name from a kiwi similar thing.

Richard Minkley 24:50

Did you learn? Okay, so your approach, I'm assuming there was a period of time when you knew of each other's existence, or did you immediately go we should work together. We should do to join up. We should

Geoff Monk 25:02

I think we pretty much hooked up straight fairly quickly. And I think I was in a couple of shows run by Jeff as well.

Richard Minkley 25:10

How what was the difference between NitWits? And was it Missimp at this point or is it mission improbable?

Geoff Monk 25:16

Probably becoming Missimp at that point, i think yeah

Richard Minkley 25:18

yeah. Okay, so what was the difference between nitwits and Missimp?

Geoff Monk 25:24

Not a lot of the time, I think we were both still doing short form shows at the time. So we were very similar. I felt

Richard Minkley 25:32

okay. And did that sort of coming together happen Basically, as I don't know whether to call him to Kiwi Geoff or Geoff, when he went back to New Zealand is that when there was a kind of amalgamating of all the different teams?

Geoff Monk 25:51

Yes, because I don't think at the time there was sufficient people to warrant having both. Both teams going. I think it was probably too, too small a group, the size, the community was too small at the time for two groups to coexist.

Richard Minkley 26:09

How big was community?

Geoff Monk 26:10

Well, I think we'd probably getting about 10 to 12 of us regularly going to Missimp. At that time, probably a few more. And they were they were probably getting eight to 10 going to their. I think at the time, I think we used to compare numbers of if anybody went to both, so he got about 15 people come to his group and, I think he had some connection with the university as well. So I don't remember but yeah, it's what night of the week suits people. And sometimes you get more, sometimes less.

Richard Minkley 26:47

That's fascinating. And it's interesting because you so there's lots of things spinning in the air that I need to catch in sort of bring down.

Geoff Monk 27:02

And we're not even into into the second decade yet.

Richard Minkley 27:05

This is why there may be a second and if possibly, even a third, I don't know. Because these things are so dense with information. What kind of we're going to take a couple of steps back and go to the pla... Arts Theatre? What games and stuff? What what stuff were you doing in that workshop period of the arts theatre?

Geoff Monk 27:28

I think we were still doing all the same stuff. But I think that repertoire of games ha expanded a bit. So we just had books and whatever we found online where it existed, and there was I think, or the improv encyclopedia existed on online and we would pull off more games from that sort of thing.

Richard Minkley 27:48

Would you say it was more book led or web search led or was it more just

Geoff Monk 27:53

a bit of both, but I can't remember for sure.

Richard Minkley 27:55

Yeah. Okay. So do you remember any particular games because you said it have expanded. At the minute we've only really got a couple of games. But do you remember what games you used to play there?

Geoff Monk 28:09

I think it would be all the same games that we still play today. The classic one that was always played is whose line which is the line written by the member of the audience, put into a hat. And then we pick three or four lines for our scene per player. And you randomly pick them out during the scene and justify them and that still a big crowd pleaser because it involves the audience throughout the throughout the scene, even though the audience are not interrupting, that they've got a pre written interruption for your scene, which they will enjoy hearing their line read out

Richard Minkley 28:47

every ones every ones had the suspense of Will it be my line.

Geoff Monk 28:49

Yes. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 28:50

very good game.

Geoff Monk 28:50

So it keeps the audience on their toes and that keeps the audience attention that game. It's a great game.

Richard Minkley 28:55

So are there any other games you remember from the The Arts Theatre days.

Geoff Monk 29:02

date, date night.

Richard Minkley 29:04

what's what's date night?

Geoff Monk 29:05

Well, you'd get it would be like a blind dates where you'd ask you'd have three players and one contestant sorry three potential dates and one contestant.

Richard Minkley 29:18

So date night would be a non copyright version of Not the price is right

Geoff Monk 29:22

blind date

Richard Minkley 29:23

blind date.

Geoff Monk 29:23

yes and the the people going on dates would be given strange attributes. They would be a dinosaur or a famous person or a table. It doesn't really matter what they were the audience, we we'd send one person out the room, the audience would make suggestions and we'd give these attributes to people. And then the per the candidate would have to ask them questions, and they'd answer in the style of their character or object or thing and then have the person would have to guess who they were.

Richard Minkley 29:56

I love the idea of someone being a table on a date, thats great.

Geoff Monk 30:00

guessing games. so more guessing games came on old job new job where you have to incorporate elements of an old job and a new job into your scene. So, yes, lots of good old, classic games which have become well known. Over the years, you might leave some games for a couple of years, and then come back to them and start changing again

Richard Minkley 30:23

remember any games that had that experience.

Geoff Monk 30:25

Probably all of them in time.

Richard Minkley 30:26

yeah?

Geoff Monk 30:27

Yeah. So all apart from Whose Line that's always consistent and one or two others. But for example, at the moment accents is less played at the moment seems to be some sort of political correctness, correctness that

Richard Minkley 30:40

can be controversial.

Geoff Monk 30:41

It can be controversial. I don't think it needs to be as long as you don't lampoon people too much.

Richard Minkley 30:48

Yeah. Sorry, I'm resisting the urge to just have a natter about improv and stuff like that.

Geoff Monk 30:56

Yes

Richard Minkley 30:57

Pulling myself back. Then you went over to Hopkinson's Gallery,

Geoff Monk 31:01

yes,

Richard Minkley 31:01

the art space. I haven't figured out one name for what it was back then.

Geoff Monk 31:06

yeah

Richard Minkley 31:06

But some arts thing that is now Hopkinson's,

Geoff Monk 31:08

we would have stayed there indefinitely had they not decided to stop being an art space and turn into a gallery and the vintage store.

Richard Minkley 31:20

So you've described this as the most fun shows that you've had there. And you've also described it as, you know, having a bigger audience. You've also described it as getting more enough money to pay for lighting.

Geoff Monk 31:38

Yes, everything worked well together. The atmosphere is right. People all pitched in and put the set together. The community was motivated and we all enjoyed ourselves. We we all got a drink out of it. And we nobody was A big drinker. But you know, you'd like to have one drink. At the end of the show with you mates, don't you.

Richard Minkley 32:06

did it serve drinks at the artS space

Geoff Monk 32:09

we, teas and coffees so people could buy teas and coffees and they, they, they would keep the door for that. We would pay the space, a percentage or a fixed fee out of what we took for the night. And we would have the rest we'd bring our own and we'd have the rest for for funds for the future. So that's how Missimp became financed. Really, that really was a good money spinner for a while.

Richard Minkley 32:37

Yeah. And you've also said that this is the point where the community really started to something began working with

Geoff Monk 32:45

yeah at some point in the mid 2000s. And Justin had left. So it was just me and at some point, Nick Tyler, who had come most of the front and he and I took over the running of the we were kind of the joint leaders of the group along with Marilyn who who gave a lot of support to nick and and have a say what was happening.

Richard Minkley 33:10

When did Nick? Why did Nick start? From your perspective? At what point did Nick start picking up that kind of leadership responsibility?

Geoff Monk 33:21

In terms of leadership responsibility when when Justin left, I think he we needed somebody to He said he'll, he volunteered to be treasurer, which was fine by me. And yeah, that's when we started to have those sort of joint approach to it. And we took it in. Basically, it wasn't going to be just me, leading the workshops all the time. We took it in turns to lead the workshops, and then as people were trained up with, we let other people lead the workshops, and the jams or whatever you'd like to call them. The rehearsal sessions for what is the basis of the performances in the future.

Richard Minkley 34:00

Okay, so sorry my cogs have just spun and I'm trying to put this together. So was there a formal structure because you said oh yeah, Nick'll be the treasurer.

Geoff Monk 34:13

No, there's no formal structure no

Richard Minkley 34:15

was that a kind of like it was the sense of a treasurer or was there some sort of like structure to it?

Geoff Monk 34:21

No, we didn't even have a bank account at that stage. I mean, just Justin had been the treasurer.

Richard Minkley 34:26

Okay.

Geoff Monk 34:27

And now So Nick took over as the treasurer

Richard Minkley 34:30

it's the mid 2000s What was the money contained in. a very particular word

Geoff Monk 34:38

a string bag under next bed? I think

Richard Minkley 34:40

Really?

Geoff Monk 34:40

Yes.

Richard Minkley 34:41

Wow. It sounds like a bank robbery

Geoff Monk 34:44

the same. The same. decorative bag was used for many years.

Richard Minkley 34:48

A decorative bag.

Geoff Monk 34:50

soon become a tin eventually it was like a i think it was green with some red on it and it had a like a one of those ties and it was like a proper little. Mini swag bag. Yes.

Richard Minkley 35:03

I'm gonna resist the exploration of the history of how you contain money because that sounds fascinating. But that's not necessarily what we're here for right now. But another thing that you've described is you've used words like, you know, you were you and Justin, were kind of leading it sort of sorting out where the performers were happening, then there's a big gap to where Justin leaves and now Nick's picking up more responsibility, and you you've its become more appropriate It seems to describe it as a community coming together and working.

Geoff Monk 35:39

Yes.

Richard Minkley 35:40

When did that transition happen from group of people building an audience to a community working?

Geoff Monk 35:52

I think it happened when we moved to the Hopkinson's Gallery and it happened embryonically and organically. And with no formal structure actually discussed, but by default, Nick and I had been kind of leading it. So we just carried on leading it for a bit. That changed in 2009 when I took a sabbatical to Canada for five months, six months.

Richard Minkley 36:20

So in 2009, you were still at the Hopkinson's Art Gallery,

Geoff Monk 36:25

I believe. Yes, we were, but we were transitioning. No i think it happened After that. We'll come back to we, at some point we were told we couldn't use the Hopkinson's Gallery at the time anymore. But we got a residency at glee which lasted a couple of years. And it was a monthly show at Glee, which was a new comedy fairly new comedy club at the time. I think we can partly credit Helen, who was who now runs the Nottingham Comedy Festival. She, she liaised and got us got sort of that she was involved with glee and got us an introduction. I think maybe Nick went went along, had a meeting and sorted their their. I think we actually did their opening night of the Glee comedy club. So that was very. It went down very well. So they were happy to they got two major rooms and they were happy to give us a Friday night. And once a month to to do a show.

Richard Minkley 37:36

That's fascinating. I have a feeling we are going to, for this interview, I think we're going to basically stop at the end of the Arts. The Hopkinson's space era,

Geoff Monk 37:49

yes.

Richard Minkley 37:49

And take that as a chunk. So I kind of want to dig in more because it feels like a lot happened at the Hopkinson's Gallery. You've described it as embryonic and organic.

Geoff Monk 37:56

Yeah, it was a very happy time to think for everybody. They were it was a warm space a warm, friendly space that people enjoy performing in. And

Richard Minkley 38:07

so

Geoff Monk 38:07

we did the short form games we were not at this stage sort of learnt long form and all these other Harolds and other things that we've done since but was the audience was coming in and enjoying it.

Richard Minkley 38:22

So describe if it's okay describe for me a typical Hopkinson's space show day. Like what would be the process of that day.

Geoff Monk 38:31

so If it started at half, seven, we'd tried to or eight o'clock I think we, everyone should be there by seven to help set up. we had to put staging out out of a back room and chairs out. So put the staging out and 50 chairs and hang up these blackout curtains. So the whole standing on these, these tall ladders to hang these back up so that the hooks were already there. I think we just had to hang them up. The lighting was plugged in, the lighting was already up. my brother ran a sound and lighting company. So luckily he he supplied the equipment there at a reasonable rate.

Richard Minkley 39:07

What was your brother's company?

Geoff Monk 39:09

night air productions.

Richard Minkley 39:10

night? air? Yes. Oh, very interesting. That's very helpful as well I imagine for you guys. So you set the curtains and then you said you set up it was about a 50 seater venue?

Geoff Monk 39:22

Well its as many seats as we could fit in really it would've fitted in, you would have fitted in 100 people easily. But I think we put out about 50 or 60 seats, and most of those were occupied for a lot of the shows.

Richard Minkley 39:35

I was going to say like, what was the what was this kind of number of people turning out?

Geoff Monk 39:41

Yeah, I'd say between 30 and 50. Most months. I think the lowest we ever got was maybe 20. But most most months were good turnouts. It could have been whatever reason, but people like the BYOB and it was I think it was two or three pounds to Come and see us something like that.

Richard Minkley 40:04

So its two or three quid to get a ticket.

Geoff Monk 40:05

I think it was three quid public and two pounds for concessions something like that.

Richard Minkley 40:12

Hot damn that's cheap ticket

Geoff Monk 40:14

We were talking 10 years ago. So yeah, this but Yeah, cheap then

Richard Minkley 40:19

I was going to say. Okay, and then what how would the show run? So you've got, let's say 30 to 50 people in as a crowd, they brought their own drinks, what would the show be?

Geoff Monk 40:35

Well, we take it in sense to compare it. So the Compare would explain what the improv was about what was going to happen. They'd already collected the suggestions from the audience for the who's line game, and then we play all the games. We'd have maybe eight of us on stage as players that night and we'd mix it up and just, it could be players out the hat, but we'd already sorted decided the running order the games we're going to play. Sometimes we've decided who's going to play them. But otherwise it might be names and games that perhaps. randomize it more.

Richard Minkley 41:13

How did you decide? So because for example, you were saying that we you decide who performed and what you began to decide whether they were going to pre decide who was playing the games or not. How did you decide who was going to be performing at the space

Geoff Monk 41:30

Well We have the pre meeting, maybe at the Broadway the week before or a few days before. And Nick, I think at the time, worked on the probation service in spreadsheets, statistics and things like that. So that was a he was a whiz with spreadsheets and set out a spreadsheet of what how, what was going to do and it would add up how many people have performed. So being pretty fair about how many games you play. How many times you're on stage?

Richard Minkley 42:03

Okay. And?

Geoff Monk 42:05

And it would it would rotate fairly around around the players. So if there was like 12 to 15, 16 people who were capable of getting on stage, then it was A Do you want to be on the show? B Do we have enough spaces to be on the show? So we get as many people who wanted to be in the show on stage as possible.

Richard Minkley 42:27

So because we've, there's a difference there, because in the early days, it was like, there's about enough of us [...], but now you've got enough people to need to cut down or pick which people perform and who doesn't.

Geoff Monk 42:41

Hmm.

Richard Minkley 42:41

How did people get involved? And were you still running workshops or jams or drop ins?

Geoff Monk 42:50

Yeah, yeah. Every Thursday, it would be drop-ins and it became I think like the jam, but there wasn't formal course but it was if you were up to speed with the games, if you've done a bit of improv before, or if after a few weeks or a few months, and it just depended on the person really, if the person learned quickly was got the techniques, if they just got it, then they could be on stage fairly quickly.

Richard Minkley 43:20

How did those Okay, so first of all, what word did you use to describe their sessions? Was it a drop in was their jam? Was it a workshop? Was it kind of all three?

Geoff Monk 43:29

All three I think,

Richard Minkley 43:30

yeah?

Geoff Monk 43:30

yeah, we didn't use drop in at the time. I think it was either jam workshop or slash, jam slash workshop.

Richard Minkley 43:36

What how did those run like who was? What were you doing in the workshops? And how was it?

Geoff Monk 43:42

Oh, it's all pretty much the same format we have today with a warm up. So one person will lead it that week. We've had warm ups for 15-20 minutes. Then we just play lots of games.

Richard Minkley 43:57

Was there a particular I'm going to chase down these kind of details because they're fascinating. So like, how did you decide who was running What? In a workshop?

Geoff Monk 44:09

I think we would just take it in turns to there was probably at least half a dozen people by then who would regularly lead. So you find yourself leading once every three or four weeks, or every five or six weeks, depending if you wanted to lead it or not. So it was very much it wasn't difficult to find people to lead but wants to try and keep it. rotational I think it was for a while it was Nick and myself taking it in turns. But as things changed after 2009 when, just before that, I think we just before I left, for example. Lloydie came along.

Richard Minkley 44:49

I was gonna say like who was so Lloydie comes in late 2000s.

Geoff Monk 44:55

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 44:57

Who was in the community Or let's let's break it down a bit who was in that sort of band of people leading workshops in the art space?

Geoff Monk 45:10

I think it was Nick myself might have been David, Canadian David. Charlotte Matheson that's all that immediately spring to mind Yeah.

Richard Minkley 45:31

Was there anybody else in the community at that point who you remember being particularly prominent or regular? Because it seems that we've gone from having about six people to having about 12 to having maybe more.

Geoff Monk 45:45

Yeah, well, this this photographs which exist and I have to point them out and thing, yes, hits him it's him. But people off the top of my head, like they a lot of those people have not been in for the last 10 years. They were they were probably around Then, but didn't stick around into the later 2000s, the 2000 and teens kind of thing.

Richard Minkley 46:11

Yeah, I'm kind of fascinated. I'll ask you kind of this broadly again. So I'm just double checking my notes. So yeah, for you as a we're in a situation where this is now going on for. I mean, it's almost 10 years. You're in the Hopkinson's Gallery. What's the difference between the Hopkinson's Gallery for you as a performer, not just as someone who's leading something and building it's kind of arguably getting more successful as, as a as a thing, whether that's a community or a show?

Geoff Monk 46:53

Yes.

Richard Minkley 46:54

Something. What what for you is the difference between the early days, maybe the the At the Arts Theatre days or Hopkinson's Gallery,

Geoff Monk 47:03

the Arts Theatre we were still looking for pub spaces through through to play in. And, pub spaces you never got the full audience Attention all the time. what you have is far more difficult because there's always somebody like in other if they gonna see a band or stand up, stand ups got the attention because they're used to people talking and heckling and they can put them down. It's a bit more difficult if people are whispering in the back during an improv show, or they can just talk during a band playing. So people are not used to in a pub staying quiet. And you've got to have the whole room quiet with no access to the if it's one room in a pub. The pub can't be having people order drinks at the bar

while you're on stage. So ideally, a pub room is separate from the bar area where people are ordering drinks. It's a spare room at the back Or above the pub. Whereas it felt in Hopkinson's Gallery like an art space that we were it felt like we were in a theater. And that's the difference. and we got the full attention of the audience while we were on stage.

Richard Minkley 48:14

So it felt like you're putting on a theater you're putting on a show in a theater. theatrical space.

Geoff Monk 48:19

Yes.

Richard Minkley 48:19

How did how did that feel?

Geoff Monk 48:22

Also, I think it made every, it made the show joyful.

Richard Minkley 48:26

Yeah,

Geoff Monk 48:27

that's what I love about improv. When you're when it's going well, and the audience has got the the attention, it can be joyful. And that's what we got at that point. So this thought was, until fairly recently, again, I think we had a golden period in Missimp History. We sort of achieved after nearly 10 years we'd achieved the start of the community which couldn't really be stopped. It was a is grown I think its own momentum to a certain extent. But luckily there were enough people running it now with the willpower to keep taking it forward.

Richard Minkley 49:09

and it didn't have to be you, I suppose.

Geoff Monk 49:11

No, no, very Very much so. And I said when I went to Canada in June 2009, and I said to Nick, you'll take good care of it when you are stepping back and he would be kind of on his own, but I needn't to worry because there were people standing by ready to help.

Richard Minkley 49:32

That's interesting because like, we've been talking about, you know, people trying to do improv trying to have a good time trying to try to find that joyful feeling. You just said you will take care of it, won't you? Did you feel a certain amount of ownership of Missimp.

Geoff Monk 49:50

It was like a little bit like my baby in a way because I'd been there right at beginning but no I didn't feel like it belonged to me. I just felt that I had a Major say in the community and I wanted to keep it as open as possible and to to as many people who wanted to perform as possible. And I think when I got back, I think there was a movement to a slightly towards, you really got to be very good to be on stage, you've got to, you know, I think we were getting a smaller core group of performers who were considered to be of the standard that we were aiming for, where, which I felt meant that up and

coming performers got less stage time. And therefore, the people who were already got the stage time were getting better and better, which is great for them. But the people weren't getting the stage time weren't getting better. So they were being left behind. And I think it's changed again. Now, more recently. We're getting lots we've got lots of performance groups. There's lots of opportunity to get better and lots of opportunity to perform. But there was a period where, especially when we moved to the one show a month at the Glee Club. The the group became a little bit I felt to I can't quite describe it, but the too exclusive I would say and not not open enough. So I think the community stalled for a while. And I certainly Glee worked very well to begin with. But then as it as the more and more we performed at Glee, the more and more I think the people who were regularly performing became confident, but actually the audience's coming to see us were declining. And eventually gLee said that we couldn't have the space anymore. And we had to take a step back and re examine what what we Were,

Richard Minkley 52:00

it's interesting. You've just talked about the decline of The Glee Club in the frame of that sort of more exclusive, feeling like there is a smaller group of performers who were Missimp.

Geoff Monk 52:12

Hmm.

Richard Minkley 52:14

Do you think that led to the decline? Or do you think that decline happened for another reason?

Geoff Monk 52:19

Yeah, I think if you don't involve more people performing, then their friends and family won't want to come and see the core group. They want to come and see their people who have been their friends and family, their friends and their family who've been going to these rehearsals want to perform. So I think there were some the community wasn't big enough to sustain a larger audience coming to see us and in spite of Facebook adverts and mailing lists, we weren't continuing that expansion of the improv community. And we weren't attracting the mainstream audience because improv was and remains still a bit of a niche thing which not everybody understands. You can't advertise it, like improv comedy. We weren't help to be sure we weren't helped by Glee, not promoting them promoting us themselves in their program because they only promoted standup. We were kind of like, the poor relations that had the use of the room once a month, and we had to do all our own publicity.

Richard Minkley 53:28

I kind of want to sit and talk to you for another hour about The Glee Club. It's a period but to step a couple steps back, I just want to round up talking a bit about you. Hmm. When did it begin to feel like you were responsible for a community?

Geoff Monk 53:48

I think it was probably the late 2000s up until Yes, the 2007,8,9 those are those three years up to when I went to Canada.Yeah,

Richard Minkley 53:59

Would that beginning in the Arts Theatre, the art space that is now Hopkinson's Gallery?

Geoff Monk 54:04

I think it began, I think began when we moved to the Hopkinson's Gallery. That's when it began to feel like a community because it felt the group was more accessible. More people heard about us. We were getting people, we're getting up to 20 to 25 people coming to these jams and it was a lot of fun having a lot of playtime. I think. If you asked Nick that my I noticed he posted on Facebook recently when somebody posted a Facebook picture from the late 2000s. He said that was one of his happiest times he remembers. So I think he was also enjoying it very much at that time.

Richard Minkley 54:42

But did you feel like you were So you felt like you were responsible for a community? What did that feel like?

Geoff Monk 54:50

Oh, yeah, so I take responsibility seriously, while having fun. Not too seriously. But you know, I think Yeah, I my commitment level was to go in at least once a week. And even though I lived in Mansfield until 2014, or 2015 Yeah, I would travel in 30 mile roundtrip from Mansfield So it was a fair distance but I've traveled further since then.

Richard Minkley 55:20

Well, quiet. I know you've come up from Cornwall for this so.

Geoff Monk 55:22

Yes.

Richard Minkley 55:22

Wow.

Geoff Monk 55:23

Yeah. Yeah, it felt like it was something I really wanted to do and I really enjoyed it. And I liked seeing the success of the community and I it's nice to watch your existing friends enjoy themselves. I always enjoy myself and also new people coming along and discovering improv for the first time it's magical to watch somebody discovering improv, enjoying it for the first time and that that improv bug bites them and it's great fun to watch.

Richard Minkley 55:53

So that's that this is the last question you've just talked about what it felt like to be responsible but Why did you over that whole like 10 year period? Keep coming back to do improv in Nottingham?

Geoff Monk 56:09

Well, well, I had other hobbies I went I used to go windsurfing, was in a Sailing Club for a bit and I don't for an evening out. I was not sort of one for just going to sit in a pub and having a drink. I always like to be doing something and so it's something you can do without, I love acting and theater performing. But not the scripted kind that's just so the amateur the amateur dramatic side of things ceased to interest me. And I but I wanted to carry on being on stage without too much rehearsal. So short of getting professional gigs to be on stage in a theater, which was very time consuming and as a career choice, this is something you can do for great, you have great fun on an amateur level. But you can do it in a semi professional way.

Richard Minkley 57:17

So it seems it feels like that's more how you started, but not necessarily why you stuck around. Like I'm very particularly interested why people keep coming back. So it's not just why did you get into it? But why did you keep coming back to it? Why did you keep finding gigs above pubs? And why did you keep organizing rehearsals and workshops?

Geoff Monk 57:42

Because it's fun. pure fun. Why does anyone run a dance team or a Rugby Club, somebody's got to do the organization. Somebody's got to decide where and when. But it ran on autopilot after a while to a certain extent. But people would look to someone to lead it. Not everyone always stepped up. But I've always felt like I want to step up. I try to make things happen. I enjoy trying to make things happen.

Richard Minkley 58:18

I mean, fantastic. I'm going to stop recording there. But thank you so much for your time.

Geoff Monk 58:24

Your welcome.

Richard Minkley 58:25

actually, before I start recording, is there anything else you want to add? Before I stop recording just for this session, you're allowed to say no, but if there's anything else you want to say, while we're recording,

Geoff Monk 58:35

so if we if we did have another session later, I think yes, we should try and speak to Andy Barrett and Justin Gould Charlotte Matheson and anybody involved in those sort of 2000 to 2010s that we can get hold of Ross Parish. Yeah, should definitely speak to Ross.

Richard Minkley 59:00

I need to talk to you that that definitely something I'll come back to.

Geoff Monk 59:05

Yes, I just think there was a period when, which you might touch on next time when the group took us off a little bit too seriously. And it was supposed to be fun, but it wavered for a while in terms of who could play. There was a one person who came and muscled into a leadership role, who I think prevented the group from actually being expanding and growing. And they probably didn't realize it at the time. They probably didn't intend to do that. But it was seemed to be more about the their position and power than it was about growing the community. Thankfully, they left. So I'm not going to mention their name. But certainly in the last four or five years, the communities expanded almost exponentially. And it's it's very much better organized than it was. More people are stepping up to take roles. I think they've split the roles from just two people leading it, which I think was a wasn't a good thing to be for. It was fine when we were small two people leading it, but when when the group is this size, you need a leadership team. Now i'm not going to call it a committee, but you need a leadership team and to delegate the roles. And I think the people who are stepping up and leading it today and have've helped create all the teams and nights and different its diversified, and we should never stop it expanding and we should encourage people to set up more teams, more improv nights. It's not competition were a community where whatever people want to do, should be encouraged. We can't

control the quality we can just hope But it's going to make improv more popular who not, and not mess it up for us.

Richard Minkley 1:01:06

Well, we were saying earlier, be average

Geoff Monk 1:01:09

well be average in your approach, and hopefully you will enjoy it. And will in the eyes of an audience come across as genius.

Richard Minkley 1:01:21

Ah, it feels like we've only just begun. but

Geoff Monk 1:01:23

Yes,

Richard Minkley 1:01:23

I'm going to stop recording now. Thank you for your time.

Geoff Monk 1:01:25

Thank richard.

1.2. Interview 2 of 2

a) Part 1 of 2

23rd September 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, improv, nice, bit, community, left, glee club, feel, glee, started, thought, Canada, theatre, scene, nottingham, impro, sound, Calgary, moved, improvisers

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Geoff Monk

Richard Minkley 00:00

Record here.

Geoff Monk 00:01

ok

Richard Minkley 00:02

There we go. So this is Richard Minkley interviewing Geoff Monk on the Missimp oral history project at four minutes past 10. On the Wednesday the 23rd of September. Yeah. Good to see you, Jeff.

Geoff Monk 00:18

2020

Richard Minkley 00:18

yeah 2020.

Geoff Monk 00:19

Hi, Richard. Yeah. Good to See you.

Richard Minkley 00:21

I love the pretense of saying hello, how are you? Good to see you. When, we've already been talking for about 10 minutes anyway. But yeah, so this is the second interview where we left off last time, we had a bit of a recap. But we were Missimp was in at The Glee Club and at the Hopkinson's Gallery, or what was the Art Org?

Geoff Monk 00:47

Yes,

Richard Minkley 00:48

back then. And we basically got to the point where you went to Canada, and it feels like that's a good spot to jump off in. So what,

Geoff Monk 01:00

yeah, so I had, I had a good experience in Canada in 2009. There's the loose moose theatre there in Calgary founded by Keith Johnson, who seems to have written one of the one of the handbooks or two of the handbooks that are used by improv. I had a little bit of experience there. Met Keith two or three times to say hello to I wasn't taught by him. But But he was in he was involved in one of the master classes I took with a with his protege that now teaches mask. And yeah, he Yeah, he watched some shows that I was in as well. So yeah, I was in the presence of Keith, a few times. And that was great.

Richard Minkley 01:43

That's really interesting, because he literally wrote the book, like literally, he wrote a book on impro, called impro. So to begin with, what what brought you to Canada, in the first place?

Geoff Monk 01:55

Well, we were taking a break from changing was from from selling our house. My mom died a couple of years earlier, this is 2009. She died in 2007. And my wife and I decided we wanted some time away. We were between we weren't we were renting. So we had the flexibility to to go away. So we just took that and we we'll pay rent in Canada for a bit instead. And so we realised the maximum we could stay with six months. So we timed it so that we we stayed for just under six months. And also because we wanted to take our dog with us. We It was a long trip on the on the on the ship on the Queen Mary actually. [...] by getting off topic

Richard Minkley 02:47

this is a very important part of history. What was the name of your dog?

Geoff Monk 02:52

Coco

Richard Minkley 02:53

Coco. That's delightful.

Geoff Monk 02:56

she's still she's still with us. She's 13 and a half now. so

Richard Minkley 02:59

wow

Geoff Monk 03:00

yeah,

Richard Minkley 03:01

good coco

Geoff Monk 03:02

cause she was only two in 2009. So

Richard Minkley 03:04

Oh, my days that's adorable. Anyway, completely off track. But it's okay. So you were just gonna go What were you? This is? This is kind of a little bit outside of the remit. But we just did you have savings that you were on? Or were you just like, Did you find a job there?

Geoff Monk 03:23

I work from a laptop. I run a travel business, which runs on a laptop anywhere.

Richard Minkley 03:30

Wow

Geoff Monk 03:31

I prefer running on a desktop. It's just easier. But because laptops are just small and fiddly. And I like to have a mouse i'm a bit old fashioned that way.

Richard Minkley 03:40

You that's interesting, because we are entering an era where people are working from laptops in different places. But

Geoff Monk 03:48

oh i was doing that more than 10 years ago,

Richard Minkley 03:51

ah, this is no wonder that that's okay, that's really interesting. But I think one of the most relevant things for this is that you went to loose moose theatre, was that what you were aiming to do? Or was it you went? Turns out, that's what that is?

Geoff Monk 04:14

Well, we'd already been doing to Canada a few times over the past previous few years. We actually bought a condo out there for a while, which was like an investment. And then we decided to sell it. And that those profits from that also help fund the trip. So yeah, we just wanted to chill in the mountains in Canmore in the Rockies National Park and we just loved it out there. And that's why our other happy place apart from Cornwall, so we now we're living in our happy place now. But we do intend to make another return trip to Canmore at some point,

Richard Minkley 04:55

Canmore and the area in

Geoff Monk 04:58

its near Banff. So Yes, Canmores on the edge of the National Park and then Banff in the middle of a bit of the Rockies National Park. And then Calgary's 60 miles away, which is where the loose moose theatre is and 60 miles is more than a trip to Birmingham back here, but it only takes an hour. In Canada, you just got to, Calgary, highway, Other place. its like there's no places in between. It's just

Richard Minkley 05:27

yeah,

Geoff Monk 05:28

vast and easy to drive. So gas is cheap. So I would go either a Friday or a Saturday night, every week or most weeks, for five months to loose moose theatre. I really got involved. I got in their Maestro shows. And I actually, they're so inclusive, they allowed you to host some of the shows, even though I was just like some guy off the street. And said, Well, this is what you do this, this and this. And I became a host for maybe three, three or four shows I hosted.

Richard Minkley 06:00

Wow.

Geoff Monk 06:01

So which is which is amazing. And I also got to be in the shows as well. So you just turn up. There's usually about 20 people, they have a one hour workshop before the show. And then it's a right who wants to be on the show. And they choose about 14 people and the other six people, they volunteer at the bar or the ticket office. So it's a very inclusive and well cooperative Theatre, which is a is a proper 200 seat Theatre in so it's well established, as you might expect, and the shows were about \$10 or \$12 to come into the show, which is about five or six pounds.

Richard Minkley 06:43

Yeah, that's about right. Yeah. Wow, so much to dive into there. I suppose we'll go right to the beginning. What was your first impression of loose moose theatre when you first got?

Geoff Monk 06:58

Well, I couldn't believe that they got this amazing space. It wasn't just like a barn turned into a theatre. It was called Crossroads market, which had a shopping centre marketplace on the ground floor. And then you go up these stairs and then the loose moose theatre is a purpose built 200 feet sitting theatre with proper lighting and sound system and curtains and everything. And it's just theirs, you know, it's not anybody else's. It's just theirs they they have two show two shows a week, and then a Wednesday show as well, I think so, maybe three or four shows a week plus workshops, and they have a summer school.

Richard Minkley 07:38

wow

Geoff Monk 07:38

But I think it's run on a non for profit basis. Basically, it's just it is a charity type business. And I just admired the way it was run. It was great. Wow.

Richard Minkley 07:49

So sorry, I was looking at my notes and it's just awful scribble at the minute, but Okay, so you said you were going there for Friday nights? Was it a drop in Was it a show? Was it What did you go for? Like what was the actual activity?

Geoff Monk 08:09

Well, they had, they always had they pretty much kept the same format because it was popular with an audience they they needed to attract an audience to keep the place going. And but it was always so so much fun. It was games and scene based. They they usually had about out of the 200 seats, they would probably fill about 80 was typical, sometimes fewer, sometimes more, but that was a that was a decent night for them. And then obviously, they also i think they did pantos at Christmas or

something which I never saw. But that that usually packed the place out that that's where they made quite a lot of money as as a lot of theatre companies as companies do make money from panto. But yeah, beautiful theatre, great experience, great bunch of people and some of the people have gone on to be on TV. Ryan Stiles started there. 30 years ago or so. Now we've got really, good guy to watch a guy called Andrew Phung. And he's a co star on Kim's convenience, which is a CBC its on Netflix. if you give it a Chance. he's a Asian chap. Really funny guy and I'd seen him. He was there while I was there. And he'd been there a couple of years before. I'd seen him on the show. He is brilliant. So, so funny. He's such a nice [man]. So a guy to watch local back in Calgary And many, theres many more too.

Richard Minkley 09:37

So it's so you've said there were games and scenes. Was it? Did you say that was a show you went to see or was it a drop in like I'm trying to understand what Oh, sorry. Yeah. the activity was?

Geoff Monk 09:51

It was maestro. So it's the show Maestro, which is an elimination for fun game. So yes. The the people with the lowest points get eliminated, so they don't go through to the next round. So they have about four rounds of play of players. So you start off with 14 players, you come down to one maestro, who wins a framed \$5 bill, which then gets used again next week. And it's all for fun. And even if you get eliminated from the games, you can come back and support, it doesn't mean it means you're not in the running to be the winner. But you can come back and be scenery, you can come back and be a character. It doesn't mean you're out of the game. It's pure play entertainment.

Richard Minkley 10:38

That's interesting.

Geoff Monk 10:40

That was one of the things I wanted to bring back to the UK because I think I tried to promote it as a as a good popular format, that that sells, that people can understand. They can see that repeated. It's an easy show to do. And also, you know, it's just fun to do.

Richard Minkley 11:03

Yeah,

Geoff Monk 11:04

but no, the answer was no, we don't do competitive improv.

Richard Minkley 11:08

I see. It's interesting.

Geoff Monk 11:11

We did try it once, at a 24 hr. Or maybe twice, but they I'm not sure I could get my point across. It was just no competitive improvisation isn't for us.

Richard Minkley 11:22

Did it feel like when you were in Canada doing it, did it feel like competitive improv?

Geoff Monk 11:29

No, it didn't.

Richard Minkley 11:30

Huh.

Geoff Monk 11:32

They also had a format called, or they had guerrilla Theatre on Saturday nights, with the more experience the most experience performance, I saw that a few times as well. And that would be scenes directed by the players taking turns to direct a scene. And I've explained its quiet a long time since I've scene this, they would take it in turns to direct a scene, and then the audience would vote which which scene they wanted to see more off, so they all direct to like, four players would direct scene each. Yeah. And the audience then vote, which directors seem Would you like to see taken forward. And again, that would be a kind of Best Director type of thing.

Richard Minkley 12:16

That's interesting,

Geoff Monk 12:17

So again, some sort of elimination or popularity thing. But again, just pure fun.

Richard Minkley 12:22

Something that has been coming up a lot is the distinction between short form and long form. It feels like this, the form the both formats you've just described Maestro and gorilla burger. It sounds like they could be considered short form, and they could be considered long form.

Geoff Monk 12:39

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 12:39

was was

Geoff Monk 12:40

I think they are a bit of both

Richard Minkley 12:42

was that language used

Geoff Monk 12:42

There are quite a few formats. Not really. No, I don't think so. The proprietary formats from Keith Johnson, which are copyrighted. And he's based on his principle that his mind is his brand of impro takes its inspiration initially from sort of pro American, sorry, pro Mexican wrestling, or pro wrestling in general, which is all faked.

Richard Minkley 12:47

ok Yeah.

Geoff Monk 13:15

But it's done for pure entertainment for the audience.

Richard Minkley 13:19

Huh.

Geoff Monk 13:20

And you get to boo and hiss for the baddy and cheer for the goodie in the scene.

Richard Minkley 13:27

That's really interesting

Geoff Monk 13:27

it's kind of an adult, almost like an adult panto. So how how a theatre can be successful for 30 years doing the same format?

Richard Minkley 13:41

That's really interesting.

Geoff Monk 13:45

It's probably 40 years now, actually, because that was 10 years ago, they'd been going for 30 years.

Richard Minkley 13:50

Okay, so before we kind of progress on a little bit more, in fact, there's two questions I have for you. Let's go with the more basic one first, what kind of games were they playing? Do you remember there being different games on offer?

Geoff Monk 14:11

They would be probably two thirds scenes. So they will just start with a couch or park bench. And people would just do their thing. You know, you're just like you do in any improv scene. Improv scene. I still can't get over saying whether improv or impro is so many people say it different ways. Let's say it's improv. So yeah. They would do the interview game. They'll do all the popular games we'd play hands through. Expert interview. But they just seem to do them larger than life, the theatre space, the lighting sound, and it was in that moment going to the loose moose I, I saw How important lighting and sound was to a to the scenes. Now we've we have added lighting. We don't seem to have got the hang of sound particularly. We, well back in Missimp we've not had a permanent keyboard player ever. Well not not say ever. We had one in the very first few years Simon Dumbleton who who moved to Sheffield and then Leeds and then some somewhere we. he's lost unfortunately, lost to us but

Richard Minkley 15:34

has vanished.

Geoff Monk 15:34

we need most improv groups could do with either a Richard ranch type character in their group who can just accompany scenes, or somebody who's an expert on a laptop that can just summon up a tune at will to match that what they're watching who is an improviser, Not just a technical person.

Richard Minkley 15:55

So how did loose moose use music and lighting?

Geoff Monk 16:00

Yeah, they would have a laptop with a pre program load of different tunes. So they'd have Darth Vader music for something sombre, who was romantic scene they'd go to either Blue Moon or a nice soft glow of red and, and play sort of French Cafe music, that sort of thing. So yeah, all the sort of almost cliched music you would associate with things as as appropriate. They had maybe dozens of things they could use, and sound effects they could use as well.

Richard Minkley 16:34

That's fascinating. So was it like, there was someone watching and if they found themselves going towards some sort of archetype of a scene, like, like you say, like a romance or a fight scene, they could just hit fight scene music and fight scene lighting, and the thing would change?

Geoff Monk 16:48

Yes,

Richard Minkley 16:49

oh very nice

Geoff Monk 16:50

Yes. And sometimes the lighting or sound person would see it potentially going that way, and then force it to go that way, so they were the third improviser in the scene. So worthwhile. The two people, man or woman or whoever on stage, decided not decided at that moment, it was going to be a romantic scene. They would change the lighting and the music, and he would suddenly, it'd switch up and they would feign surprise, much to the audience's delight that changed that the stakes had gone up a little way in that scene.

Richard Minkley 17:31

I can imagine that already being really funny. That's really interesting. So, okay, so before we move on to going back to England, and Nottingham. What would you say to kind of summarise it? What did you bring back from Canada, but mainly, like the loose moose theatre.

Geoff Monk 18:01

I brought back more I thought, trying to reinforce impro and Keith Johnson's ideas. We he's a British and he's Canadian because he, he was he was British, and he moved to Canada. And he so he's been there forty years now. Because, Britain rejected things that weren't scripted. So the Lord Chamberlain said, things have to be scripted and approved. So he did impro. He tried to do it as wrestling type thing. Try to get around it, but eventually just found he was hands handcuffed, in what he wanted to do. And that's why he took it to Canada. So

Richard Minkley 18:45

Wow,

Geoff Monk 18:45

he's been happy there ever since. So I tried to Yes, we we have freedom back here. We got no scripts, but I feel that we've we've embraced America too much in our style of impro.

Richard Minkley 19:01

What do you mean? I didn't mean that sound confrontational? I'm very interested in what you have to say about this.

Geoff Monk 19:11

I think there's lots of good ideas come out of America. And We obviously worked with some very good American improvisers. But I just think the the Canadian humour is softer and more similar to the British sense of humour. And the Canadian the American sense of humour. seemed to have dominated its the New York/Chicago style improv. Americans. God bless them, they can be a little bit shouty and angry. Bless em

Richard Minkley 19:48

Bless em

Geoff Monk 19:48

And no, I love Americans, because they're so nice and friendly, but they their brand of comedy can be a bit shouty and angry. But they they, there's so much good American stuff. But in the improv world, it's just a feeling just a theory. And it's not a I'm sure its not a widely held belief. And it's just my personal thought that I would like to see. A bit more paying attention to what goes on in Canada. I never see Canada mentioned in any online chats or anything. Then I went to no one ever talks about Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, which are the big centers of improv in Canada. It's all Chicago, New York, and other other places in America.

Richard Minkley 20:43

That's fascinating. And I suppose the final question for this, it it's a little bit of asking you to use a little bit of like, insight. So if you feel like you can't answer this, that's fine. But did it feel like a community in Calgary with the loose moose theatre? Or did it feel like either like a theatre or something more professional or corporate? Did it feel like a community?

Geoff Monk 21:14

It did feel like a community that welcomed people in. And yeah, I mean, their were personalities in there that were obviously showboating a little bit. But most people, they were really nice. And they just welcomed you in. And I was just [privileged] that I felt privileged. And I felt very welcomed. And Canadians are just North Americans. everybody you meet if you're nice to them, they're nice to you. I'm not singling anybody out.

Richard Minkley 21:44

everyone is lovely.

Geoff Monk 21:46

Everyone is lovely. Yes. Well, I'm just thinking when communities become a collective and get together. Yes. Is the overwhelming feeling you get not not the the odd individual personality.

Richard Minkley 22:01

That's very interesting. So did it. Did you feel, How? What do you think the difference was between the the community in Missimp and the community in Calgary at that time? Because it's interesting listening to the last interview, there was bits where you were, you were talking about, towards the time when you were in the Art Org, it started to feel more like a community more people started turning up. So I'm interested to what that community felt like compared to the one in Calgary.

Geoff Monk 22:37

So Art Org, yes, we every time we turned up, we literally built the set. The the we did have the lights permanently installed in the roof, which were great. But then we had to bring out staging, we had to hang up the curtains that we have stored in the back and just assemble the chairs. It felt like we were creating something each time and it was all hands on. So I think as it as it went on, they we were doing it very well. But then there was the it was working, So but why change it. It was working, but it got changed. And that's when the audience is I think started to dwindle a little bit.

Richard Minkley 23:32

okay

Geoff Monk 23:32

And where as loose moose. Yeah, it felt community wise and they kept doing the same thing because it's successful. successful. So yeah, they did. Experiments they did.

Richard Minkley 23:47

So the main difference was that loose, loose moose was successful.

Geoff Monk 23:50

Yeah. Well, that was that was one thing.

Richard Minkley 23:52

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 23:54

Yeah, I mean, yeah, improv has probably got a wider acceptance in Canada than it has over here.

Richard Minkley 24:00

Okay. Well, let's jump ahead then to your time in Canada has come to an end. Did you come straight back to England and Nottingham? Or did you?

Geoff Monk 24:12

Yes.

Richard Minkley 24:13

And did you come straight back to Missimp? Or was there a bit of time where you stayed away?

Geoff Monk 24:18

No. straight straight back. I think I came back the the week we got back Yeah. we came on by sea so there's no jet lag so i wasn't too exhausted.

Richard Minkley 24:30

Wow. How long is a sea journey? On a? I'm assuming it's like a cruise ship.

Geoff Monk 24:36

It was five days on the Queen Mary. Which now I think they've extended it to seven because they if people are on board longer they spend more so

Richard Minkley 24:45

not. its a fair point That's fascinating. So was it the same community and the same improv that you came back to or had there been changes while you were gone?

Geoff Monk 24:58

I don't think it's been as much of a change or many new people, maybe a couple of new faces, I think the one thing I do remember is that before I left, I think Lloydie had only been there about three or four months. It and when I got back obviously been then about about a year by the time i got back, so yeah, he was he was a trooper. And he's always been, I think, a good influence on the community. [Improv] He's always embraced improv with a passion.

Richard Minkley 25:33

Yes. Very much so.

Geoff Monk 25:34

good on him Lloydie Yeah.

Richard Minkley 25:37

That's interesting. I'm trying to pinpoint in my head where, where in the story of the community you are at this point? Had you already had shows that The Glee Club by the time you'd come back from Canada, or had they not started yet? Because if you spent six months, it was almost 2010? Or 2010? thereabouts.

Geoff Monk 26:03

Unless I mentioned it before, I don't, I'd have to check, but I don't think they'd started yet.

Richard Minkley 26:07

I see

Geoff Monk 26:08

I think they've happened. I'm not I'm not 100% Sure.

Richard Minkley 26:12

So do you remember the first glee show?

Geoff Monk 26:16

I do. Yes. I was not in it for some reason. But it was a it was a big. It was the opening night of Glee. It wasn't our own independent show. And I think Missimp had been asked to do a spot, or they did about 20-25 minutes or something.

Richard Minkley 26:37

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 26:38

The room was packed. And it was a good atmosphere. I think they brought the house down. Actually, I think they're probably the best act of the night. So heads. So from that, from off that they got a regular monthly slot.

Richard Minkley 26:54

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 26:56

Which was great.

Richard Minkley 26:57

So when you say,

Geoff Monk 26:57

Everyone's very excited about it. I was also excited about it.

Richard Minkley 27:02

when you heads, Do you mean that their egos kind of exploded a little bit?

Geoff Monk 27:07

Maybe,

Richard Minkley 27:08

maybe, okay.

Geoff Monk 27:09

Yes. That everyone's everyone was proud of the show. It was it was a funny show. It was good. So I think that what happened next was. the Glee was, Glee Club was not on our side, really in terms of supporting us. So they thought we were going to bring our own audience in terms of who came to the Art Org, which I think we got a maximum of, maybe I think the biggest audience we ever had at Art Org was 70, something like that. But on average, it was 40 to 50. And sometimes I think it had started to dwindle as we made some changes. I don't strictly remember. But we had to move. at some point from the Art Org, I think for for a short period we were doing glee and Art Org In the same month. So two weeks on two weeks, kind of the dates either. But

Richard Minkley 28:07

were you involved in any of the shows?

Geoff Monk 28:10

Yeah, I was. I was in about Initially, I was in them a few times. But you know, because there was a, there was a core rotation of maybe 15 or 16 people who perhaps of the standard that could could be in the show. And we still had quite a few beginners at that stage. And it tended to be a core six to eight people who actually did the did the shows. So you would have expected to be in the show. Five, six times a year, perhaps. But that's not what happened. There's always two or three people who are always in the shows. Unless of course they weren't available. They were in holiday or something. But they got a free pass into the shows. And then the other people have to take their turn or. That's that's when I started think, Hmm, this doesn't seem fair.

Richard Minkley 29:16

I was gonna say. I won't ask. I won't ask who those people are. Because of this next question, which is I can I can hear a kind of reserved tone or a slightly conflicted tone in the way that you're describing

these things. What did you make of the way that process worked because you don't sound completely comfortable with it.

Geoff Monk 29:43

So before the the Art Org shows, we would the week before we would sit down at a cafe like it I remember often quite outside outside or inside a Broadway. we would go through, who wants to be on the show, pick games who wants to do which game. So we, we democratically discuss a running order. And there wasn't really, no one was really excluded from being in the show, if they really wants to be in the show. Whereas when it moved into Glee, it suddenly became more professional. In that, that there was no longer there was one person who decided what the running order was. And I did get to do that. I did get to run a few shows myself, but it was pick the [games], pick a running order, and pick who's in it. So if 10 people wants to be in it, you had the task of picking. I'm not quite sure how it works. But it just seemed like, Yes, I always wanted to be in the show. But I didn't expect to be in every show. I'd've expected to be in about half of them. And also take my turn, maybe on the door or doing the sound or just ushering people about whatever was required. So yes, I did all those things. But some people only went and did the shows, they never did the door. They never did the lighting or sound or anything of the other jobs. So they what happens there is the people who get performance experience, more performance experience than everyone else get better than everyone else. Because the more time you spend in front of an audience performing, the better you get. Most of the time, that seems that seems to work, you get more practice at something you get better at it. so I felt my improv was was suffering a bit because I was not getting that time in front of an audience as much as I'd like. And also worried that It knocked my confidence, because I'm thinking am, am i not, I might just do, is it that I don't fit in? Or is it I'm not good enough? Um, I was never. It was never discussed. That sort of thing. Really.

Richard Minkley 32:22

That's very interesting. So something you said that was that it affected Your improv and your confidence. And I'm kind of interested in both of those ideas. So when you said, it kind of affected your improv, what do you mean by that? Like? Because I understand the idea. Sorry, carry on.

Geoff Monk 32:42

Yeah. So just in just in terms of how confidently you can perform in front of an audience becomes easier when, when you have more practice in front of an audience. So so there's, there's take Nick Tyler, for example. When I first met him, when he first joined the group in the early 2000s, or the end, the, whenever he joined the group, it was about around about the year 2000. He was not a, he didn't come across as a very confident person at all, which is hard to believe, because he has become very confident on stage and a great compere He's always a, he's a very good, eloquent speaker anyway. He's got a great vocabulary, and he's quite physical and quick. [-]

Richard Minkley 34:08

this. That's very interesting. you've made a kind of connection there with saying that the actual skill of being an improv performer. While there is a little bit of well, there is knowledge about what you need to do and how games work and what certain moves you could make. A lot more of it is confidence. And to be a good performer, you need to be a confident performer. Is that a fair description of what you just described? Do you think?

Geoff Monk 34:37

You can be confident, you can fake confidence you can but to build confidence you need practice. And not just practice, in a room with jamming with your friends. You need practice in front of an audience. Because if you think of if it's a scripted performance, just Doing a scripted performance in a rehearsal room, you know, if you get it wrong, you fluff your lines, though theres going to be no judgement, you do and you go again, you can't do that in improv, but it's the same principle. You can, we do embrace failure, and if it goes wrong, and it's how well you embrace failure in front of an audience, which can affect your confidence. And I'm, I'm just happy to, I'm happy up in front of an audience and a lot of the time i. I got worried that I stopped being nervous. Going up on stage, I just went up stage and did it. And I thought, well, I when I first started out, yes, I was nervous I, I felt I had the confidence. So I thought, well, either I they they don't think I'm good enough, when I'm doing something wrong. Yes, I guess we all make slip ups. But in improv, you should support your partner, cover it up and make it work. With their, basically your you and your partner should embrace failure. You do you do work with some difficult scene partners sometimes. But it's the more experienced the improviser you are. And I would say that, if I ever say, I'm going to give a compliment to nick now, because if I ever worked with Nick Tyler, he's very good at making you look good. He is. he's honed that he's honed that over the last few years. And I'm not gonna say any more about that, but to hes he is. He's a I like to have him as a scene partner.

Richard Minkley 36:45

If

Geoff Monk 36:45

but you've also got to leave space to listen, and let the other person do the scene as well.

Richard Minkley 36:51

That's really interesting. So it's interesting that we're talking about this while we are talking about The Glee Club, because you've talked about the professionalisation of, well, not the professionalisation of Missimp. But the feeling that the standard needed to be higher at the Glee Club, which suggested you needed less failure? So, do you think that there was a link between the people who went on to do better and better at the glee club and get loads of experience becoming more confident? And the fact that there were people who weren't going and performing at the glee club as regularly? Do you think that led to an additional insecurity in them that they were kind of being left out?

Geoff Monk 37:41

Yeah, I think there's a bit of a two tier thing going on, and that we could have brought in, brought on more talent more quickly, by having more inclusivity inclusivity in performance by either I suggested we, we split the Glee show into, because it was already in two halves, I think it was to 40 minute halves, something like that.

Richard Minkley 38:03

Yeah,

Geoff Monk 38:04

we could have had a two different performing groups in the two halves. No, they weren't having any of that. So it was, [know], the same six performers would do both halves.

Richard Minkley 38:16

wow

Geoff Monk 38:16

Or 8 performers, and I thought, well, missed opportunity. You could've had the, what we do now, for example, at the crash bang night, what what's it that Liam runs.

Richard Minkley 38:28

Crash bang night. smash night.

Geoff Monk 38:29

Yeah, smash Night,

Richard Minkley 38:31

Crash bang night would be equally good?

Geoff Monk 38:34

Yes, yes. and You'd have short sets of 20 to 30 minutes with different groups performing. And we should have invited groups we should have. But we probably didn't have as many connections we do now. But we should have encouraged more inner groups at that early stage within Missimp. Rather than the, there was only one performance group. That's it. And I was very much told by the guy who's left now and he was actually kicked out. But I don't need to mention his name at the moment that there is only one perform, there's only room for one performance group. And there's only room for you know, how someone else commented, you would saturate the market you have more than one improv improv show a month. Nottingham's a huge city. What if people can make it on that night?

Richard Minkley 39:30

Yeah

Geoff Monk 39:31

Yeah

Richard Minkley 39:31

that's very interesting and something that's clearly Well, there is always an issue of capacity. But with there are many groups, there are many shows and we still rattle on so I suppose that's been disproved quite resoundingly, for the record should I should say,

Geoff Monk 39:49

yes. I think [it has yeah]

Richard Minkley 39:52

that's,

Geoff Monk 39:52

I knew it was rubbish. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 39:54

That's fascinating. So I'm looking ahead, right. So what came, I'm looking ahead? We've got about 15 minutes left of this part of the interview, and I'm just thinking, What's the important things we need to cover. What did nice come about before or after the end of the Glee club?

Geoff Monk 40:25

Well,

Richard Minkley 40:25

I should

Geoff Monk 40:26

I don't remember exactly. I don't remember exactly to find out when glee ended and when nice started,

Richard Minkley 40:32

okay.

Geoff Monk 40:33

But there was a general feeling that there was not enough stage time for people. Because it was only six to eight people performing once a month in one one space. Whereas Yeah, Art Org had provided at least a bit more inclusive inclusivity. And more laid backness and more rotation of people.

Richard Minkley 40:57

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 40:59

And Yeah, so nice. Yeah, the and also in the, the rehearsals, they, they raised, I think we used to, on Thursdays, it used to be a pound. And then it was raised to two pounds, and it was raised to three pounds. It's not the fact that, it's not a lot of money. It's, it's peanuts. It's just how and when it was charged, and what you got out of this. And then there was the secrecy about what they were doing, I say secrecy, there was the translucency on or

Richard Minkley 41:37

transparency?

Geoff Monk 41:38

curtain over, transparency, lack of transparency, over what they would do, or where the money was, how much was there and what they were doing with it. And again, I'm not accusing anybody of anything wrongdoings, I'm just saying that, why just not publish, keep accounts and publish them. Because if, or just show them to people who wanted to know, and they they were never shown

Richard Minkley 42:06

that that's, that's very interesting, because I don't know whether you said it in this interview, or when we were chatting previously, you use the word exclusive to describe how Missimp had become towards the end of the Art Org and during the Glee Club era. Because you just said that, like you weren't suspecting people of being like corrupt and pocketing the cash. But there was a feeling that things were being kept from you and the community is that, are those two ideas connected this idea of exclusivity in the performers and sort of not being included in the actual running of the community.

[-]

Richard Minkley 43:39

I think this is an interesting point to just round off our first interview, first half of this interview, and then have a quick break and recharge our glasses and such. So before we end, is there anything you want to say on that? The period we've just covered is is Canada, a little bit of the glee club a little bit Art Org, Anything else you want to say on that period?

Geoff Monk 44:36

Yeah, I think I, I recently posted something on Facebook that Nick really liked. It was something about it was a it was a Art Org show. And he posted and he actually made a comment about it being really happy, simpler times. So I think pre is my experience only not anybody else's. But before I went to Canada, everything seemed to be going well, before we left the Art Org, everything seemed to be going great. The Glee Club was the beginning of some of the problems. And also the individual that left was kicked out. So I think every organisation has its dark days, but I want this oral history project to be an overall positive look at Missimp. And most of my experience has been positive. there was just I think there's a, maybe a four or five year period from just just after I went away, or just after just after I came back from Canada to until I even after I'd started nice when there was a lot of friction going on. [-]

Richard Minkley 46:36

So I'm going to I'm going to stop recording record here.

b) Part 2 of 2

23rd September 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

[due to how this interview was transcribed all as one audio file, the summary of keywords for the second part of the interview is included in the first.]

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Geoff Monk

Richard Minkley 46:37

And I'm also going to hit record here. There we are. So it is Richard Minkley interviewing Geoff Monk, for the Missimp oral history podcast. It is nine minutes past 11 On Wednesday, the 23rd of September 2020. Fantastic, let's jump right back into it. So we left off talking about the we were talking a little bit about the Glee Club and the effect that that had on the community and the way it affected some of the people involved. I'm interested, I think it's quite important in this part of the interview to focus a little bit more on nice. And the things that happened sort of after that, because I feel like that is quite an important part of your story. But as an improviser, and

Geoff Monk 47:29

Yeah, cuz we're two thirds of the way through the interview was about nine years left.

Richard Minkley 47:33

Yeah, we're gonna need

Geoff Monk 47:34

to cover

Richard Minkley 47:34

to rattle through this one. But so

Geoff Monk 47:37

yeah.

Richard Minkley 47:38

When did the idea of nice first come up? And I'll say for the record, what does nice stand for?

Geoff Monk 47:48

Nottingham improvised comedy experience.

Richard Minkley 47:52

That's a nice name. [hurhurhur]

Geoff Monk 47:55

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 47:56

Sorry. But yeah, so like, where did this idea come from?

Geoff Monk 48:06

So I was I felt that due to the Chap that's left now. My ideas were not being heard my influence from you know, I I don't want power. I want to be heard, I want to be listened to. And I want people to think that that's a fair, I don't want to if people don't like the idea. I don't like to know why they don't like it, you know, and so a reasonable reason.

Richard Minkley 48:45

So if I may. I would like to put a bit more of a point on this question, because I can see that this is a not a simple anecdote. It's quite a complex thing. So it seems that nice started with a dissatisfaction in what was happening in Missimp. Is that fair to say?

Geoff Monk 49:07

Yes, yeah, I was looking for some I was looking for more performance opportunities. Initially, the very first idea why nice started was jams Were getting to the high teens and even the low 20s in attendance. And the I think the the fee was three pounds at the time. I think it's now five pounds, something like that. But that does doesn't mean that doesn't really matter here. It was the fact that they were getting they were getting so busy. I thought, well, they've always been on a Thursday. Surely there's a demand for another jam. In the week so more people can practice because you've got two hours. You've got 20 people You don't get a lot of practice time. So I think about 12 to 15 is a good number or eight to 10 is a great number for rehearsals and practice, you get plenty in two hours. Whereas with the numbers, we're getting so much that, yeah. While they were fun, and it's always good to watch other people, you're just not getting quite as much out of it. I suggested that we start another one under the Missimp banner. And that was, no. so I thought, well, would be okay if I started one? And very Initially, I decided to make these initially free I because I didn't wasn't paying for the room, I got a deal with Bunkers Hill. And so do you can have the room for free, provided people buy a drink, you know, that's great. So we, we started doing that. And the next thing was the guy who left accuse me of stealing the, the jam income, because some people, there was only three, or maybe two or three people that chosen to go to Mondays instead of Thursdays. But some people ultimately went to both. So people got to more rehearsal time, more practice time. And also, I published it on meetup, promoting it so that we got more people from Nottingham involved, because not everyone can make Thursdays every week. And so initially, I started it as a not named subsidiary of Missimp. But you know, I was fully intending it to be part of Missimp. The fact that it was free, meant that because while I was I was [thinking] is to know how the money was accounted for. Because I didn't want to just collect two quid or whatever and hand it over to Missimp without knowing what's happening to it. And there was no transparency on that. So I thought, well, this free. But eventually, I think I started charging a pound. Because it was it was costing me my time and effort.

Richard Minkley 52:29

yeah

Geoff Monk 52:30

And because I because of where we live, we've moved to Derbyshire. And I was traveling 40 mile round trip, I thought, well, it's reasonable for me to make a five or six, seven quid or whatever to cover the fuel. And there was a bit leftover, I thought, well, that can subsidize the weeks that we didn't make some. and sometimes there weren't enough of us. Eventually, the the bunkers hill started charging 20 pounds, so I had to raise the the cost to two pounds, or I don't know what it is now. I think it's still two pounds. But that counted on getting 10 people there. So it was it was no profit idea. Just running. And yeah, being a thought well great, i'm being accused of stealing your Jam money. And it just a completely ridiculous idea. But pretty soon I was without being, I know that the chap has left, had become an admin of the Facebook page on Missimp. I was an admin page on the page. without even being informed I was removed as an admin from the Missimp Facebook page. And I asked to be restored, and I was not. So that's when I said right well nice is. I've moved a bit more towards nice and started going less, to Missimp. That was probably a while after I started and I don't quite remember when that happened. But for a while I tried to get to both. I've always tried to maintain good relationships with Missimp. I'm pleased to say that in the last three years or so, couple years, whenever that guy left after that guy left things improved tremendously.

Richard Minkley 54:27

So we are somewhere around 2010 2011.

Geoff Monk 54:33

Maybe later,

Richard Minkley 54:34

maybe later.

Geoff Monk 54:37

not sure

Richard Minkley 54:38

not sure. It's well, the specific number isn't important. I've got lots of questions about what you've just described. But I feel like the important one to begin with is how did that feel to be treated in that way?

Geoff Monk 54:59

Well, you felt very, I was quite sad. It was a group that I was a founder member of, I think I was the only remaining founder member who was actually there from the very beginning. Because Because Nick and Marilyn and anybody else came two, three years after we started and although, I didn't feel that gave me an automatic president for life type of position, or any sort of guarantee of influence. There was no democracy within the group. And I felt I'd been pushed out by personality and bullying, with, you know, without the consultation. But for the good of everybody, I didn't want the group to, to have a big problem. For example, I, I still actually own the domain name Missimp.co.uk. But anytime, if I'd been such a person, I could have pulled the plug and said, right, you know, I'm taking over. I could have made some moves. But that's not me. I, you know, the greater good is what I'm concerned about. But it felt like I was being sidelined.

Richard Minkley 56:28

So, okay. This is kind of a small detail. But when you say you were accused of stealing the income from Missimp, was that like, someone said it behind your back? Or you heard it in terms of gossip? Or do they directly say,

Geoff Monk 56:46

no, they said it directly to me? flabbergasted really, I mean, it's figuratively I'm not actually taking money, but by people not going to Thursdays and not paying them their three pounds or whatever. And I'm thinking, Well, why are they so concerned about money? And that also made me think, Yeah, also. Questionable transparency of it. Why are they so concerned about the money? It doesn't cost that much to rent a room per week, you've got far more income from the charging people than the room costs. Then, there's insurance. I'm hosting the website. So what are the other costs? It just doesn't add up.

Richard Minkley 57:38

This is gonna sound like an oddly specific question. But what Where were you told this? Was it through a message face to face after a jam or something? Or was there a meeting?

Geoff Monk 57:53

It might have been in an online chat on Facebook.

Richard Minkley 57:56

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 57:57

Or it might have been face to face i i don't precisely remember at this moment. There's other things I remember that was said to me face to face. And, and that brings up that would bring me on to the start of the British Improv project in 2015.

Richard Minkley 58:15

You know, what you've done so much, I'd completely forgotten about that. British improv project. British, improv, project. Right, we'll come back to that. Moving something else I need to specifically pick up on there You said you one of the things. that one of the points at which you knew you were being distanced was when you were removed as an admin from the Facebook group. How important was that Facebook group to Missimp as a community?

Geoff Monk 58:47

I think it's the main form of communication with the group. So the fact that I couldn't share my, that they saw me as a rival rather than a partner, or I saw it as an opportunity to grow improv in Nottingham, they saw it as a rival organisation. That's what that's the feeling I got. and I think I always look, I've looked further ahead than some people or I'm not going to take any credit for but we've we've seen in the last three to five years, three to four years, I don't know exactly. But having lots more improv in Nottingham is a good thing. It's it brought on more people having more groups, having more performance groups is a good thing. And it's made improv great. I think Liam's smash night is the best thing that ever happened to Missimp in the last three or four years because it has brought in more guests more inclusivity and more opportunities for more Performance groups. It's not about one, it's what the improv is all about having lots of opportunities to perform, not just about having a jam and having workshops.

Richard Minkley 1:00:15

So, at this point when you were, you've said it in such a way that at the beginning of nice, you considered yourself to still be a member of Missimp. Did was there any point where you felt that you officially basically broke ties? And you were your own thing? Or did you always feel a part of Missimp?

Geoff Monk 1:00:37

I've always felt like I'm a member of Missimp. Um, I've never been, like, actually kicked off the Facebook page, for example. There are people still members of Missimp, who no longer even live in city and haven't done for a while. But no, you can still be a part of an organisation because it's, it's full of so many good people. As all individuals, I would say, with the exception of the one guy that got kicked off for his own, for the good of everybody. I can have a great conversation with anybody in Missimp and get on well with them. Sometimes, I wonder there's one or two characters, I wonder what's lying behind the nice conversation. But generally, I feel that, that it's nice to see people I'm always welcomed. I get on well, with everybody. Pretty much.

Richard Minkley 1:01:36

Okay, so let's let's dig into nice a little bit, then. So you've already said you've done it at Bunkers Hill, I believe. I mean, apart from the pandemic, it's always been based in Bunkers Hill, is that right?

Geoff Monk 1:01:54

Mostly, I think we did have to move around a bit. Sometimes. Because while we had a, while we had the room booked on a Monday, if he got anything else happening, then because we got the room for free, or 20 quid or whatever, if he got 100 quid booking, he would kick us out because it'd be then full of people going for a drink.

Richard Minkley 1:02:16

yeah.

Geoff Monk 1:02:16

So I enjoyed, not enjoy. But sometimes it was a challenge of the last minute you got there. You've forgotten to tell us we got there at 20 past 7 when he said, Oh, no, you're moving. So it became creative, with sometimes it was a nice weather in summer we had outside in the in the market in the Sneinton market on the outside area.

Richard Minkley 1:02:38

some interesting problem solving.

Geoff Monk 1:02:41

Yes. Some some diverse and interesting rooms. And other times we actually chose to perform outside because, well, I've [already] 20 pounds, for example.

Richard Minkley 1:02:51

So what

Geoff Monk 1:02:52

another, another venue we use quite a lot was what was the orange tree on Shakespeare Street.

Richard Minkley 1:02:57

oh, yes.

Geoff Monk 1:02:57

I'm not sure what called now but yeah, that was a nice little room there. We used that quite a bit.

Richard Minkley 1:03:02

So what did you This feels like an obvious question. But what did you do? Like what what type of improv were you doing in nice,

Geoff Monk 1:03:14

well pretty much similar to Missimp. But we didn't really do long form, per se, we can't be we focused on practicing the short form games. And something we that I felt strongly about, which also, I came in for some stick from from the guy that left and was the warmups before a game, before you start, I think is always very important to warm up for the beginning of a session, whatever whether you're going to perform whether you're going to have a jam, whatever. there surely should be some sort of warm up. I just voiced up, I thought that the the voice the warmups at Missimp had got very repetitive. And even when I go today, they're always still exactly the same and have been exactly the same for about 10 years or more. And all that beating the chest and things like that seemed a bit ritualistic. And if you're not going to be doing any large, i'd say your not going to be doing any large shouting to the back of the room, then why are you warming up your voice to such an extent, we're going to be talking normal volume. And we're not, some people who just doing this exercise won't be talking again for about 20 minutes. So it kind of didn't seem worthwhile. And the guy who's left actually agreed with me. And he encouraged several of us to rally, not not form a mutiny, but just sort of all voice our voice our concerns were upon he then turned around and actually said that well These warm ups are exactly as they're performed are actually a very good idea even though he'd may have been quite vocal before about. No, I've just come from football practice some I don't need to warm up. And he stabbed everyone in the back. And that actually caused a couple of people to leave, I think. But it sounds it sounds bizarre, but it happened. Though he was saying that I'm against warmups, which I totally wasn't. So he was painted as a bad guy. In that circumstance

Richard Minkley 1:05:57

[-] So you changed the way you did warmups. What, what was the format? was it? Was it a workshop or drop in? How did you describe it to people?

Geoff Monk 1:06:09

It was both workshop slash drop in. So the warmups would just be three warm up games, where we still did zip zip bong, we still did stretches, but we didn't do stretches every time we didn't do zip zip bong every time we mix it up. So you've got a you might have I couldn't name any right now. But you might have 21 warm ups in the bag. Why use the same two or three? Each time? So, yes, anyway,

Richard Minkley 1:06:43

but what was the

Geoff Monk 1:06:44

thats just a it's just a. It's not a cultural things. Just It was a choice. [-]

Richard Minkley 1:07:00

So what games did you do? Like, like, what was a session at nice Like, was there? Was it basically the same format as a Missimp? Drop in but with different warm ups? Or was it just what was the format of a, a nice show or a nice workshop?

Geoff Monk 1:07:22

Well, I think we probably did more games and fewer scenes. But apart from that, I think he was very similar.

Richard Minkley 1:07:31

Okay.

Geoff Monk 1:07:32

Because most of the because I attracted quite a lot of new people into improv. So we, the we got attendances as high as 20, which I wasn't going for, but most of the time it was eight to 10. In the early days. Same sort of game, same sort of formats as Missimp. The The, the entry level was, there was no, it was cheaper, so or free to begin with. So it was easier to get to get people along, hopefully, you can argue all day about what to charge because people put a value on things, but it was made accessible to anybody.

Richard Minkley 1:08:19

Okay, so in that case, what was the difference in. Okay, there's kind of two questions here, did N.I.C.E. become its own community, separate from Missimp.

Geoff Monk 1:08:31

Yes, a bit. Yeah, I think it did. It was different day of the week. But interestingly enough, we because we, because we had a lot of beginner level people coming in, I would train them up. But maybe if it was consistently only eight or 10 people coming. I would suggest they visit Missimp on a Thursday. And they would go there and they'd see that there were more advanced performance because they've got all the experienced performers with 10 years plus experience. So immediately, they seemed much more professional organisation. Because more there was more people who are more confident. So it's about [...] about inclusivity training people up. And several people who are now with Missimp started with nice. And some people who went to Missimp subsequently left and one person did something on their own for a bit have gone to greater things.

Richard Minkley 1:09:41

So do you think that a different day of the week change the vibe of the nice community?

Geoff Monk 1:09:51

Well, I suppose Thursday's are more towards the weekend, it feels a bit more weekendy, so Monday nights are a bit harder as the beginning of the week, but It, I thought, it's a good way to kickstart your week and give you a little bit more of a lift

Richard Minkley 1:10:05

Yeah, ok.

Geoff Monk 1:10:06

Get rid of the manic Mondays, I think we call it manic Mondays to begin with. That also we, you know, all sorts of gimmicky names to to get people interested in it.

Richard Minkley 1:10:17

So how, how did N.I.C.E. feel as a community because one of the things I keep coming back to in this project is the shape and feel and dynamic of different communities. And you are fortunate to have both a perspective of a Missimp as a community and nice as a community. So what do you think the difference was?

Geoff Monk 1:10:42

Well, it felt good, except that the snag was again, because we had so many beginners level people. It was harder to get other people to lead. It depends whether we have guest leaders. So I felt that I was the leader every time mostly, I felt that was. I It brought me on as a teacher more I enjoyed teaching. However, I didn't get to play so much. Because teaching and playing in the same space is quite a skill. And I did do it some sometimes I think i probably got better at it. But generally speaking, I prefer to do one or the other. to teach or coach rather than play. So what will teach/coach or play? And doing both is quite tricky.

Richard Minkley 1:10:56

I see. So it sounds it sounds like nice. really depended on you a lot more than Missimp depended on its individual people. Is that fair to say

Geoff Monk 1:11:54

It did. And that was another reason why I can understand why people chose to go to Missimp. Because, again, you had about 4, 5, 6 people who would rotate and be lead the workshop. So each workshop with Missimp could have a different feel to it was themed or whatever. We just, it was more of a fun get together for a jam. Have fun with it. And we also did some shows as well. So some of which were well attended. And yeah, yeah, I missed the fact that we didn't have more people to to lead. I would like to about three or four people so that we can all take the in turns. And it was myself and Sabrina was running at the time.

Richard Minkley 1:12:43

What was Sabrina's surname

Geoff Monk 1:12:45

for a while. So

Richard Minkley 1:12:48

what was Sabrina's surname?

Geoff Monk 1:12:53

Sabrina?

Richard Minkley 1:12:56

Is she the French individual?

Geoff Monk 1:12:59

Yes, yes.

Richard Minkley 1:13:00

Ah, I'm glad you're looking it up. Because now I can go off of your pronunciation not mine, because I'm not good with these things.

Geoff Monk 1:13:08

Okay, let me just double check. Because I think pegeot pegeot. Its Pappa, pappa echo golf Echo Oscar Tango. pegeot. I know. I never heard. I never hear her say her own surname.

Richard Minkley 1:13:31

yeah

Geoff Monk 1:13:31

So I'm not exactly sure.

Richard Minkley 1:13:34

Okay.

Geoff Monk 1:13:35

So it'd be pegeot.

Richard Minkley 1:13:36

That's interesting.

Geoff Monk 1:13:37

She was involved for a while, unfortunately, she left in the last couple years because she got ill.

Richard Minkley 1:13:43

Hmm. Okay. So, moving forwards, then. There, it feels like it's fair to say there has been a rupture between you and Missimp. As you've described,

Geoff Monk 1:14:00

yes

Richard Minkley 1:14:00

that you always felt a member of Missimp. But there's clearly been a pushing you away. Basically. People pushed you away from Missimp. I'm trying to think how am I

Geoff Monk 1:14:16

It was not, go on.

Richard Minkley 1:14:19

Well, no, I'm trying to understand the next part in this history to talk about because there's the process of what happens with Missimp and how it changes moving from venue to venue. And there's also your experience of it, which might be very different. So, like, how close were you to Missimp let's say after the Glee Club ended for Missimp and after they left the Art Org Yeah. Yeah.

Geoff Monk 1:14:52

Well, I I never gave up on Missimp and I kept going. But But While that guy was there it was it became harder and harder. Initially, when he came, I actually supported him immensely. I went to see one of

his he was doing some stand up, went to see his some shows. And I would often compliment him on how good I thought your scene was. I thought, well, you know, there must be some way to get through to him and be on on side with him. But there was no doing that he just seemed to not want any help, from not any suggestions. I think he saw me as a threat rather than a partner. That's that he I would put responsibility for making me feel that way solely at his door,

Richard Minkley 1:15:50

because it feels very difficult to talk about your this next part of history of Missimp history with you. Because it seems to all come back to this one experience of feeling excluded.

Geoff Monk 1:16:06

Yeah, I mean, I've heard other people being pushed out for other reasons, but I not not pushed out but deciding to leave for other reasons. But I'm, I'm not going to go into that because it didn't affect me.

Richard Minkley 1:16:17

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 1:16:19

But then there was, I kept laying opportunities At Missimp's Door. I said, look, I think there's an opportunity to be the leader in the the Midlands, or the UK community here. Why don't we have a, why don't we contact other clubs, in improv groups in the Midlands and say, let's all get together for a residential weekend, because it's all very well and good having a two or three hour workshop in a city, inviting other groups to come in for the day, and have a bit of a coffee afterwards. But unless you spend 24, 36 hours continuously in the same building in the same space, you don't feel totally connected with them. You don't get to know them properly. I said, Well, let's do let's do that. And it was just, didn't seem to be any interest was near backing. And I felt this because it was perhaps because it was my idea. No backing for that. Well, I went to Birmingham and was in a show there. And I said, to two or three people from different groups. If I do this, will you support? And they said yes. And that's well, when British improv project came about, it started off as improv weekends and events, which I ran the first one at a youth hostel in Edale. And I planned for 20 odd people to turn up, but 32 actually came in the end. And the idea of. I will relink back to Missimp in a second. The idea of

Richard Minkley 1:17:54

No no, keep going Keep going projects.

Geoff Monk 1:17:55

Yeah, the idea is that rather than import highly paid teachers from America who might have a reputation, but it's, you're paying their airfare as well as is their cost, it's a very expensive way to do improv. Let's do the homegrown stuff. Let's get our, the teachers from our own communities to teach each other and do it for for a very low price. So I think the first one was 100 quid at the youth hostel, multi share, and the people who taught only paid 75 or or 50, because they got, every night, i worked out every 90 minutes they taught, they'd get 25 pound back. So we got a program together. two separate workshops, so there was 15 in each workshop. Or maybe we had three workshops, I'm not sure. So it worked out very well. And we should have had the 10th this year, but due to lockdown. It's been postponed till next April. So it's two a year. And it's been I'd say very successful. Again, it's not it's a

Richard Minkley 1:19:11

so these began around

Geoff Monk 1:19:12

but when i came back up.

Richard Minkley 1:19:13

Sorry. There's always a lag between us, which is gonna sound weird in the recording, but like, so this started around about 2015, then?

Geoff Monk 1:19:22

Yes it did, and I came back after the first one in, or, no, this was just before the first one took place. And I approached the guy we're talking about earlier and said Oh, because nobody actually from Missimp actually even came to it. It was that shouted, it wasn't actually shouted down but they all made excuse not to come. So I've gained support from groups all over the midlands except my own group, which was weird. Some people from nice came along and I said it to this guy. So what do you think? And his exact words was, Oh, it's just shit improvisers teaching other shit improvisers. That was his exact words, exact words, and it just that stayed with me. And that's when I really knew, that he was not in favour of me being in the group at all. He would like to see the back of me, out of, I felt at that point that I was not welcome in the group.

Richard Minkley 1:20:31

Is that a point where you did you feel, There's a very complicated question here about belonging, because you've already said that you felt like you've never, you've always been a part of Missimp. And you've also said, I'll keep asking a long question. So you can eat your biscuit. But you've also said that like, like you were saying that you were being pushed out and that your ideas were being ignored and your input was being disregarded. So what was your relationship with Missimp? After that moment where this particular individual said, it was just Shit improvisers teaching shit improvisers?

Geoff Monk 1:21:06

Well i thought to myself. It's one it's one individual in the group. There's a much wider group. There's lots of good people in the room. Yeah, of course, you talk to other people, and they, and they, they say, yes. Some people, most people might, some of you might say, Oh, no, no, no, I've never had a problem with him. And I thought, Well, that's because you're not a threat to him. And other people might say, Well, yes, he's a bit strange. He's a bit of a wild character. But nobody at that stage, he hadn't done anything bad enough, to the greater good of the group to, to get rid of him. But I think he wasn't, he wasn't doing good things for the. But again, he was keeping it as one performance group and not and not allowing it to expand. I don't know why he was doing that. But I felt that I was, you know, eventually, one of us would leave. But I and I would say I'll stick with it. You know, I've known these people a long time. I stopped coming as often. And I focused a bit more on nice, but which means I didn't get to perform as much which means everyone else in Missimp, who was performing who perform regularly or joined these new groups, and got better. Unfortunately, I, I had the opportunity to join some of these groups or audition for them whatever they wanted to do. I felt like coming in twice a week, or even once a week was was in to nottingham which is again. Over a 40 mile round trip for me driving nearly an hour from Derbyshire where I live now was more than once or twice a week was enough. I couldn't manage a third rehearsal. And then some weeks as it was I was coming in three times. I was going to nice Monday Missimp Thursday and the show on Friday or Saturday or something like that. Whether I was a participant or mostly an audience member details can't remember. But yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:23:32

To to change

Geoff Monk 1:23:34

so, i

Richard Minkley 1:23:37

it's interesting because that is a remarkable contrast possibly with a similar question of belonging with the British improv project. Like Yeah, because it's there's you were talking about a sense of belonging with everyone but the team that you kind of were started with so to put Missimp to one side for a second what was it like feeling like you were part of a connected Midlands community? Did that strike you in any way? Or was it just

Geoff Monk 1:24:12

yeah, I thought well, this is a marvelous thing that seems to have filled a vacuum here because the only, excuse me, the only other residential weekend as I knew about that takes place in the UK is I think might still be the case actually, is the nursery, the May days weekend in Dorset. So it's all right on the south coast. So it's a long way for people in the Midlands to go. And also it was run very well I understand. But I can't afford it. It was like, I think you could end up paying 500 pounds if you wanted a single room, but I think it was at least 400 pounds for, it was a longer event. It was a five day event. I know people who gone and enjoyed it. I would like to do that at some point. But it's finding the time or and or the money to attend at some point. I wanted to launch an affordable event that wasn't profit orientated, but would get almost as good a, probably as good as standard of teaching as to what people would get out of it. by a sense of community, the networking opportunities and the fun of it, and pick up some new improv skills in [...] taster workshops. And that's what we do we do taster workshops.

Richard Minkley 1:25:42

This is a shame. It's a little bit of a rushed question, because I'm aware we're running out of time. And there's still a little bit more I want to chat to you about but like, did you learn, that networking effect, Did you learn anything about improv or just other communities, and what other expectations were of improv while you're running and participating in the British improv project?

Geoff Monk 1:26:06

Yeah, well, I think I've discovered that all communities have their own challenges.

Richard Minkley 1:26:11

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 1:26:13

Every community and if you if you try to run a organisation, that trains improvisers to be good and start their own improv groups. excuse me. If you've done the job, right, they probably will leave and set up on their own. So this expectation of having, you know, you've got to let the children fly, this expectation of having your team and your and ownership of your team can't can't continue you, you've got to be prepared to set them free. And I think people be people still people are happy to perform under an umbrella of an organisation, but because there's already mechanism and mailing lists for publicity and that. But I think as Missimp found with glee, Glee did not promote, or include Missimp in

the mailing list as an event taking place that they're putting out their. at their venue. That's not the case, I believe in Birmingham, which also has a glee. And box of frogs are doing well were until lockdown were doing regular shows there we started a year or so back, I think they've had a more successful experience doing a short form game style show. I think where we fell down at glee was we we changed it from short form games and trying to put in long form, which at that stage Missimp were probably not the best at, they'd not had enough practice at Missimp, at long form to carry it off. And they should have stuck with the short form games. So I think that's when we lost audience and they ended up being said, we can't afford to have you if you're going to five people to which is one of the last shows that we did there.

Richard Minkley 1:28:15

Thats There's. I feel like we're wrestling through this because there's not much time left for us. But to round off. I would like to jump to the 20th anniversary. Where we had this big event there were lots of performances there was the malt cross jam, there were performances at the Playhouse. And I'm wondering, for you, in particular, as the basically the longest running member effectively. How was that weekend for you having? Yeah, How was it for you?

Geoff Monk 1:28:53

I think it was a lovely celebration, and I really enjoyed it. And I say that unreservedly. Yeah, we even had the Adey came back who was also a founding member, he was in i., unfortunately, Phil who was from Derby, he's a teacher. Unfortunately, he said he would do it and he just got it clashed with some sixth form event because he's a teacher that he was running. So it would have been nice to have him back and it'd be nice to have Justin to have made it down from from Edinburgh. but Again. It went as well as it could be I think it was a resounding success and we should have we can't have a 21st this year, obviously. But maybe we should repeat a similar event at 25

Richard Minkley 1:29:44

Yeah, maybe. I'm gonna I'm gonna dig in a little bit more of this because obviously, this is a history project and you clearly have the most history with Missimp it makes it sound like makes it sound like you Difficult lovers or something, but yeah,

Geoff Monk 1:30:03

Knowing our history. Yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:30:05

we go way back? Um,

Geoff Monk 1:30:08

yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:30:09

I suppose the question I want to know, at the end of it like, it's difficult to ask a specific question because it feels really vague. But I think that's basically what this question needs to be. What do you make of the fact that this team that you started in 1998, doing pubs and stuff has got to the position where it is now where it's got lots of things going on? Lots of people, there's this big Facebook community. There's an oral history projects happening right now. How does? How do you feel about that? What do you think about that?

Geoff Monk 1:30:55

I'm very happy that it's still going. I mean, it's happened, it is one of the longest running communities in England. I think that's That's gone continuously, with at least most of the same people. So I think that's amazing. I'm very happy I was in there the beginning. But I don't I mean, I don't tend to take credit for the long term success. I think if, if it if it had just been if we hadn't had some people on board, I think, for example, Nick Tyler, who who is so enthusiastic about it, in that he made it he is really good at graphics and things like that even some marvelous programs over the years and themed publicity. So he needed a character, especially Nick. To to help keep it going. And, it, we, you know, we avoid you to take over from the person that left. not that he trying to take it over. But he was he was close to I don't know what his agenda was. But fortunately, we the community's overcome that, those sort of obstacles. And I think where it is now as a community interest group is where I did see it going, eventually. We talked about democracy, democratizing the group 10 years ago. I wish that this happened, actually, but it didn't. Time flies. But we got there eventually. pleased to see that. You know, anybody can apply to be on the exec and I hope you will take your influence forward and embrace the the idea of inclusivity and all those kind of things. I'm sure you will, that that is currently being fostered. I think it's certainly the last year or two, it seems to come on leaps and bounds. I don't know if that's because of its its almost a trend. It is definitely the right thing to do. But I think community groups are trending, particularly imProv, you see online, it seems to be trending to be more inclusive. More,

Richard Minkley 1:33:26

We are in a particular moment at the minute, I suppose.

Geoff Monk 1:33:28

Yes. Yeah. And I'm pleased to see that. I Another thing I would have, I would encourage you to do with Missimp in the future, which I try to say we should do. You're aware the, done in hyson Green, there was a an Art Centre down there. And we we could and perhaps should be running workshops in that sort of area, in, in hyson Green, in st annes in Sneinton you know, we should go into the deprived areas, and reach out to that because that's where the diverse, more diverse members of the community live. They perhaps don't want to come into pubs, which are sort of more more frequented by the average, Caucasian Nottingham citizen.

Richard Minkley 1:34:24

Its an Interesting. I'm gonna I'm gonna steal that idea and pretend it's my own.

Geoff Monk 1:34:29

Yes.

Richard Minkley 1:34:29

So I suppose we're at a point now.

Geoff Monk 1:34:31

because if you say because you've said it's mine it wont, sorry.

Richard Minkley 1:34:34

No, I didn't mean to say

Geoff Monk 1:34:37

no. I say if you got it from me, you can tell everyone you got it from me, they won't listen to you.

Richard Minkley 1:34:42

well. This is it. I'm trying to learn lessons from history. No, I'm only joking. I supposed to round us off. God, there's so many little questions that I want to ask you but to kind of bring it together. a question I asked you in the last one, why did you keep doing improv? You basically said it was a lot of fun. And that was the long and short of it really. However, I can't help but escape the fact that in this interview, it sounds like you haven't had a lot of fun. It sounds like you've had a lot of stress and a lot of difficulty. And yet, we're still here. And the British improv project is a thing and you still feel like a member of Missimp. So to round us off, why did you stick with it, even when it was difficult?

Geoff Monk 1:35:35

Because the fun outweighs the difficulty. And I feel I can i feel strong enough to rise above any. any difficulties, that difficulty is just an opportunity. And I don't want to say to people, right, you've got to think like me, I'm, I'm influenced just as much by others opinions as I am by my own. And sometimes, if I have a we all have faults, and also i have faults, my my fault, one of my faults I know I have is, if I get an idea, I will try to shove the idea down people's throats. This is a this is a great idea. Why can't you see it's a great idea. But, you know, if they if they really did go against it i went Okay, that's fine. Yeah. And if I still think it's a good idea, I'll do it myself. Which I did on more than two occasions, at least two occasions.

Richard Minkley 1:36:42

Well, you did it with Missimp. You did it with nice. You did it with the British improv project. I have no doubt that you've done it with many other things as well. Yeah, it's remarkable how much stubbornness has played well, literally, in the history. It refuses to Missimp refuses to stop.

Geoff Monk 1:37:05

it's now I see. It's, it seems to be an unstoppable machine. Because it's now its own entity as community interest company is its own entity its not no longer just, yeah, there might be people in charge, at any one Time. And that is the way I'm thinking that, at some point, the British improv project has got to turn into something else to be to keep it going. I can't myself and Tom young, who came on board pretty quickly after it started. We're currently it's almost registered as a business even though it's not it's, it was the simplest way to start it. Because once you become a community interest company, there's quite a lot more paperwork and more things to do.

Richard Minkley 1:37:53

Yeah.

Geoff Monk 1:37:53

So at the moment, we're just relying on it, we just need a couple of straight years of, of smooth running. We've had a bumpy ride. And now now we've we've got a some sort of safety, not [...] committee, we've got like a safety and Diversity Committee has joined the British improv project.

Richard Minkley 1:38:24

Well, so we crossed the line between history and future now. So this may be a point to bring it to a close, I feel. Just quickly, is there anything else you want to say before we wrap up?

Geoff Monk 1:38:40

I've had a fantastic time with Missimp. And i really mean that in, no, i'm going, i'm going to try and sound sincere, because I am honestly, in spite of the difficulties and things that I've said, which is nobody, no particular person's fault, is it. No, no, I'm gonna say it's been a great it's been a great 20 odd years. I look back mostly with fondness on on every everything's happened. I would like to have perform a bit more. And got, I just felt that even not living in the city. I was always a little bit of an outsider. But pleased that pleased its still going. I'm still a part of it in some way that I am glad that these online jams they'll be having recently. I've been joining some of those and it's getting the same experience that everyone else is getting basically at the moment.

Richard Minkley 1:39:48

Yeah. Well, its, sorry, carry on.

Geoff Monk 1:39:54

Yeah, so I'd say if it hasn't, if it hasn't been overall positive experience while we're not so stuck with it for so long?

Richard Minkley 1:40:05

Well, it is a

Geoff Monk 1:40:05

thats all I got to say about that.

Richard Minkley 1:40:08

Well It's a remarkable achievement that Missimp gone on so long. And that is in no small part because of you. So thank you very much for both your time on this project and all the time you put into Missimp. But I think that's where we'll come to an end. So I'm yeah, thank you very much for your time. I'm going to stop the recording.

Geoff Monk 1:40:26

Thank you, Richard, I look forward to reading it all before it's turned into a publication.

Richard Minkley 1:40:32

Yeah, me too. Anyway. Bye.

2. Andy Barrett

2.1. Interview 1 of 1

a) Part 1 of 2

10th March 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

nottingham, people, game, called, Geoff, theater, Keith Johnstone, theatre, set, audience, arts, scene, improvisation, remember, malt, improbable, community, plays, adult education, work

SPEAKERS

Andy Barrett, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

-give my schpeel, so it's 10 past 10 on Tuesday the 10th of March 2020. Richard Minkley interviewing Andy Barrett for the Missimp Oral History Project. Fantastic. Let's get straight into it. So, just for the record, this interview is kind of gonna have one foot in collecting your memories of Missimp and one foot in collecting your memory of theater in Nottingham in a more broad sense, which is a bit different. But standard first question, what was your first memory of Missimp?

Andy Barrett 00:36

Well, it wasn't called Missimp then. It was Mission Improbable. And my first memory of Mission Improbable, as a word, is trying to think of what should we call ourselves when we go and do our first show.

Richard Minkley 00:51

Mm hmm.

Andy Barrett 00:51

I can't remember who bought in the words Mission Improbable, but it was like, that's brilliant. And I have to say I think Mission Improbable is a lot better than Missimp.

Richard Minkley 00:59

Really?

Andy Barrett 01:00

Well, I just think Missimp... Yeah, I don't know. I just think Mission Improbable, well, there's something about that, I really liked it. When it was abbreviated, which was after my time, I thought, oh, that's a shame.

Richard Minkley 01:14

So you were there right at the very beginning, really? Like, in fact, a little bit before then. When... Because, yeah, so like, how did you-? You were-

Andy Barrett 01:24

Should I tell you the story?

Richard Minkley 01:25

Yeah. What's the story of your connection with Missimp?

Andy Barrett 01:27

Okay. I'm going to tell you the story.

Richard Minkley 01:29

Go on then.

Andy Barrett 01:30

So I'm going to go back a bit, is that all right? I'm going to go right back.

Richard Minkley 01:34

Go right back as far as you want.

Andy Barrett 01:35

So I come from East Devon, there was a woman down there called Anne Jellicoe, who was a big playwright at the Royal Court and she'd moved to Lyme Regis, and in the late 70s, she started doing what became known as the Community Play, and it became a very popular form of theatre whereby a professional writer would come in, would work with a research team from the community, a community of place, and would write a large play for cast of a hundred people that would be about the history, based on the history of that community. And that town would put on that play with those community members who became very, very successful. The second play of those, the second one of those was called The Tide, it was set in Seaton in 1980. She came to the school I was in which was Colyton Grammar School. It was an 11+, it wasn't a fee paying school. And I was somebody that liked doing theater at the school, and I got a part in the play, quite a big part, a proper part for somebody of that age. I was 13.

Richard Minkley 02:51

I'm just going to quickly tweak your microphone because I can hear it rustling and I don't want to ruin the story.

Andy Barrett 02:56

If you want me to, I can- If you want, I can take the jumper off.

Richard Minkley 03:01

No, the jumper can stay. It's just going to go a little bit lower down. There we go. Okay, so you were saying you've got a proper part in this big community-

Andy Barrett 03:07

So yeah. So, and then through that I became, I got to know Anne quite well, and I was then into other plays. By 1984, she was working on a play called the Western Women. And during- This was being

written at the time by Fay Weldon, the novelist, and by John Fowles, the novelist, who came from Lyme, John Fowles, did and it was a play that we were working on. And- Actually, I got that slightly wrong. That's- Okay. So, around 1984, Anne, who was very good friends with Keith Johnson and worked with Keith Johnson at the Royal Court said, "I'm going to set up theater sports team. I'm really interested in this thing called theater sports."

Richard Minkley 04:00

So a theater sports team or the idea of theater sports-

Andy Barrett 04:03

A theater sports team, based on the theater sports movement, if you like, which was kind of pretty much in its infancy, not a lot was happening. And she set up a group of people, of about seven or eight people, to start playing some of the improvisation games that Keith Johnson talks about in Impro. And I was invited to be a part of that group. And I was by far the youngest, but it was a really interesting experience. So we were, we were trying out some of the kind of games, I can't remember the specific games we were playing, but we were looking at improvisation basically, we would do improvisation. What happened was, that the aim was that we would set up a theater sports team and play bouts with each other, whereby, you know, there are certain rules and a judge and we have two teams improvising. But then in the meantime, a play turned up that was being written by Fay Weldon and John Fowles, who was working as a historical advisor on it. And the improvisation work kind of gravitated towards helping to devise and improvise ideas around the play. So we were doing improvisation with Fay Weldon, but it was about the play rather than theater sports. And then by the time the play happened, I ended up, when that finished, I ended up going to university to study drama, because at 1984, I was 18, and the reason I went off to do drama was because I'd been involved in these plays with Anne from about 1980. So I was kind of immersed in improvisation from quite a young age. And then when I went to university, the guy... To do drama, the drama teacher was kind of spouting all this stuff off and I just was like, yeah, he's just quoting Keith Johnson here and he's like not saying, oh, by the way, it's Keith Johnson. So improvisation was something that I was kind of, I was aware of, and Impro was a book I knew. And then I, around 1998, so by this time I'm whatever I am, 30, kind of 30 years old. So basically, I come to, I leave University, form a Theatre Company, which is a kind of classic small scale Theatre Company in Loughborough that does kind of political plays and other plays, end up moving to Nottingham, doing other things, not doing theater work, kind of working for social services, working with people learning disabilities, which was the terminology at the time, which had come out as a result of doing other big projects that was a theater based project. That's a whole nother story. But that was the other project that we did, was the birth of what became the Architects of Air who build these massive luminariums that travel all over the world. So we did a project that basically started that thing happening as well, with Alan Parkinson. But that's another thing. And then at a certain point which was, I was looking through my diaries, I kind of went, oh, you know what, I just want to, I want to do, I don't want to be working in Social Services, I want to be making theatre. I, you know, had no money, my first son was born, you know, and I just decided to do stuff. So I had written a couple of solo shows, kind of comic seller shows. And there was a thing in Nottingham at the time called Nottingham next stage, the City Council and the county council both used to fund arts activities. And a woman... I can't remember whether Jane Hart, who was that the officer for the city, came to me or whether I went to Jane, but I was obviously just trying to kind of carve out some work for myself. There was an adult education program that did a lot of art based activities at College Street, up near the Playhouse, and I said, Can we do a comic improvisation course? And she said yes. So we did a comic improvisation course. And the comic improvisation course was me, teaching or working with the people that turned up, to guide them through and us

through the exercises, with the notion of creating a theater sports type team. By that time, Whose Line Is It Anyway being on TV was very successful, so we knew there was a template, just from watching Whose Line Is It Anyway, so people knew what we were talking about. And that was where Mission Improbable was born, because out of those workshops, in 1998, was the first one, we decided to do a gig, and we needed a name so we called ourselves Mission Improbable. Geoff, who is still in Missimp I believe, was part of that first show. And... So that's... Yeah, so my first memory of it is that.

Richard Minkley 09:10

I suppose, it's interesting because your first memory of Missimp is really before it even was Missimp. I tell you what, there's a couple of details I just want to double check with you. What was the woman's name? You said Anne Jellicoe, is that Anne, surname Jellicoe or does she have a surname?

Andy Barrett 09:28

It's Anne surname Jellicoe She died about two or three years ago now.

Richard Minkley 09:34

Oh, that's a shame. But, you also mentioned a Loughborough Theatre Company, what was the name of your-

09:41

It was called Touch and Go Arts Cooperative. We didn't-

Richard Minkley 09:45

Was it touch and go?

Andy Barrett 09:46

It was. We took it over. It was being run by some people, then we took over. Yeah, Touch and Go.

Richard Minkley 09:53

Okay. This is interesting. So at the time, this next stage, you actually have the thing in front of you, you received funding to do those courses or were you paid like a freelancer?

Andy Barrett 10:08

I was paid. So what happened was... I would get a fee from the city council. Those were the days-

Richard Minkley 10:20

Do you remember what that fee was, just to make people jealous?

Andy Barrett 10:24

I've no idea. I have no idea what it would be. I imagine it would be like £120 or something, maybe?

Richard Minkley 10:30

Like, a session?

Andy Barrett 10:32

No, not back then, I wouldn't have thought.

Richard Minkley 10:35

Like overall?

Andy Barrett 10:37

You know what? I don't know.

Richard Minkley 10:39

Yeah, fair enough. Fair enough.

Andy Barrett 10:40

And then, oh, there's another one. Okay. Oh, look, there is level two, three. So we'd obviously gone up. That's another chance to participate. And then people would have to pay. So in this set of sessions, so this is presumably-

Richard Minkley 10:54

Something's going on with- Yeah, this microphone is being very weird. I'm going to move it to there. I don't know why it's doing that. Sorry.

Andy Barrett 11:10

Um, so I could tell you exactly. So, the course was literally, it was an intensive weekend course that went from one til six on Saturday, from 10 till six on Sunday, the 17th and 18th of January 1998. If you wanted to attend that course, it would cost you £22, which is quite a lot, it seems to me back then. But there was a concession fee of £8. So there's quite a big difference. I can't remember how many people showed up. And I was paid a fee. So presumably the city council arts department... It pretty much, I would imagine, covered itself.

Richard Minkley 11:56

So was it an arts department? Because like I'm aware that there isn't like a city... Or maybe there is, and I'm not aware of it. Like there's like a council for culture or something, but was there like a particular government body responsible for all of this?

Andy Barrett 12:14

There was adult... I'm looking at the back of this. Amanda Pails, adult education. So it was the adult education department, that ran it and they... It was called Next Stage Nottinghamshire, so Nottinghamshire Next Stage was Nottinghamshire county council education, so it came through the education department.

Richard Minkley 12:36

Okay.

Andy Barrett 12:36

And if you look through this booklet that I have in front of me, you get a sense of the fact that... I mean, Nottingham was fantastic. The educational arts program in Nottingham, through the College Street and through Next Stage was really impressive. And there's singing, there's theater, there's you know, clay, working with clay, there's dance, there's just- studio mastering, there's just huge amounts-

Richard Minkley 13:10

Studio mastering, like records?

Andy Barrett 13:12

Yep, studio master [...] the secrets of the mixing desk. There was this huge palette of artistic, of workshops that were available to people. They weren't free, you had to pay, but the concession fee was very generous, and Jane Hart was the city program coordinator. So her job was to coordinate activities that the County Council were funding, but she was-

Richard Minkley 13:39

Oh, sorry, this is being trouble. No no, it's okay. Okay. So, to go a bit more specific, do you remember the games that you taught or any of the content of the course?

Andy Barrett 13:55

Well, luckily, I found my... I hope I stuck to this-

Richard Minkley 14:02

Is that Geoff? Is that Geoff's name?

Andy Barrett 14:03

Yes, that'd be Geoff's name. So I've got my... You know, because I was very, you know, I was trying to set myself up as a self employed person, so I was quite thorough. So look, I've got- and I had done at this point, a teaching course, a PG- Not a long one, just kind of adult education training course. So I've got my sheet here with my overall aims. There we go. To get the group working as a unit was my first aim. To eliminate any fear of failure and find ways in which students can be spontaneous and release their creativity. So learning outcomes, its classic, like this is how you plan. So we've got- We did warm ups, the game called Red Rover, so these are just- Grandmother's footsteps. So they're just warm up games, in terms of games around spontaneity. I mean, it says I've got no idea about this. It says, Look at the object and shout out different words. Don't quite know what that means. Divide group into two and get them to stand across the room. Anybody from a group has to hurl a word as loudly as they can across the room to the other group. And the other group respond by hurling word back that they feel suggests the opposite. Do it very speedily and energetically. Hand in a box game where you just literally pass an invisible box around and you put your hand in, just through kind of shaping some clay. Something emerges, but you mustn't think about it. And funnily enough, I played this game for the first time in a long time without even knowing this because I hadn't looked at this. I teach at De Montfort University, and [...] with some students. So, blocking accepting games, I mean, there was quite... There was a mixture of games and kind of basic... Not theory, but trying to get through this idea of blocking and not blocking. So the idea that you know, whatever somebody says you have to accept, so, "Yes, and" game "Yes, but" game. It's Tuesday, which is a game based on boring offers and over accepting it. So if A says something Matter of fact to be like it's Tuesday, then maybe B tears his hair says, "My God, I'm meant to be my exam." All that matters is an inconsequential remark to produce the maximum possible effect on the person it's said to. So those, and then I had status work in the afternoon. So yeah.

Richard Minkley 16:30

So was this, is this your first one?

Andy Barrett 16:33

That's the day one.

Richard Minkley 16:35

So because I'm interested, you said that you did theater sports with this Anne Jellicoe, I'm assuming that wasn't the first theater sports company or theater sports team in the country. But it sounds like it was, for some reason, in my head. So you weren't the first ones to do it, but you were a very early version of that. Could this be like one of the earliest versions taught in Nottingham, I suppose?

Andy Barrett 17:02

Well, it was, as far as I'm aware, but I don't know, there wasn't any comic, you know, improvisation courses that had been run beforehand. It's eminently possible that what would have happened is that, you know, theatre companies that were doing fringe theatre type things would have been aware of Keith Johnson's work and would have taught in there, whatever they were running this workshop would have taught some of these games. But I don't think there was something that was like, we're going to set up a Who's Line Is It Anyway type team of people, that what we're going to do is our, what we're selling to an audience, what we're showing audience is, Who's Line Is It Anyway, or whatever you want to call it, that was the thing that everybody knew. So, I didn't know of any before that. So I think you know, I think it was the first one.

Richard Minkley 17:49

Do you remember Geoff and, I believe, I think it was Justin Gould was potentially there as well, do you remember them at that?

Andy Barrett 17:56

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 17:58

Do you remember having any particular thoughts about them, because it turns out they took what you did quite a way. Did you...? What were you expecting to come out of that workshop, really?

Andy Barrett 18:13

Well, what happened was we ran the course for a weekend and I can't really remember much about it, but obviously it was good enough to do it again. Because we then did it again later in the year. And from that we said, let's do a gig. So we did a first gig at the Malt Cross, in October, I've got the date. And what we were hoping, what I was hoping to get out of it was that we would be able to entertain an audience really, and the gig we did the Malt Cross, I was kind of like the Clive Anderson character, I was the kind of compare. I bought a load of silly things along with me to give out as gifts, you know, prizes to the audience, like pot jam, a bottle of-

Richard Minkley 18:53

You gave a pot of jam as a-

Andy Barrett 18:55

Well, stuff. It might not have been jam, the only thing I definitely remember is I had a copy of Don Quixote, which I gave to somebody. So that was a thing I definitely remember. So I would have some things. I have this thing again, which I only remember from... Which my memories been, I've been reminded of by looking through my diary and also because I've got the introduction to the first show. So I've you know, the script of this-

Richard Minkley 19:21

This is the introduction to the first show?

Andy Barrett 19:23

Yes.

Richard Minkley 19:23

Well.

Andy Barrett 19:24

Whether I actually said that or not, I don't know. But I presumably did. And I had this big rattle which I'd got in, I brought in one of those old football rattles.

Richard Minkley 19:34

Yeah, the ones you kind of spin around.

Andy Barrett 19:37

It was so loud. I called it the crap rattle. So if it was crap, I would just rattle them off. And, it was I think we only have four or five people that would perform. Those people that you mentioned, Geoff, the guy that you spoke to recently.

Richard Minkley 19:57

Justin?

Andy Barrett 19:58

Not Justin.

Richard Minkley 19:59

So Geoff, Justin-

Andy Barrett 20:00

The guy who was in Canada.

Richard Minkley 20:01

That was Geoff.

Andy Barrett 20:02

That was Geoff! I'm thinking of... Oh, God... I'll have to look. Yeah. Another guy, who I can't believe I can't remember his name, because I bump into him all the time. And he was there at the Missimp 25 anniversary thing. Bald head.

Richard Minkley 20:19

Could be a lot of people.

Andy Barrett 20:20

He was one of the first people, so you got to speak to him.

Richard Minkley 20:23

Yeah.

Andy Barrett 20:24

Okay. I mean, he was there that he was at that gig. It was like, Geoff and him did- It wasn't Justin, or was it Justin? They did... The original people got up and did something, and he was one of them. And there was a girl as well. Whose name escapes me, who I think knew was friends with Justin. I remember those four. And I think it might have been just those four and me that did it, that did the first show.

Richard Minkley 20:55

Do you remember anything from the show other than your crap rattle?

Andy Barrett 20:58

Well, it was good. The thing is, the quality of the material wasn't great. But it's really difficult. And it's, you know, it's really difficult for... In a way, it's partly about getting the games right, we did one that worked really well, which was a police, which I think they still do, I wonder if they still do it, where everyone speaks together. And it's a something about a police. I can't remember now exactly, but it's like-

Richard Minkley 21:28

Is it like a police report?

Andy Barrett 21:30

A police report. That's it. Thank you, the police report, all speaking together. And that's just funny. Just seeing people trying to speak together. So if you can get the games right, it's funny and actually you're not relying so much on the quality of the material. But people liked it. It was an energetic fun show. And on the back of that, we did some other shows. Yeah, so, you know, it worked out fine. One of them. A friend of mine played music as well. I got him to play the guitar. So we did a musical I think at the end.

Richard Minkley 22:05

Yeah, do you remember what the musical game was?

Andy Barrett 22:08

It was- No, I don't, probably if I looked through the stuff, I'd probably find out. It was probably, you know, give us five facts about your life. We're gonna-

Richard Minkley 22:16

Give you a little film.

Andy Barrett 22:17

We're gonna- Yeah, yeah, we'll do your do your life as a musical.

Richard Minkley 22:23

So how much did you do after that? So- Cus yeah, we've talked about the course, performing in the Malt Cross. Oh, is this the song?

Andy Barrett 22:34

No, this is the- I could tell you the games that we did in the first show. And then these are some of the suggestions.

Richard Minkley 22:42

Oh! So vicar being heckled.

Andy Barrett 22:47

A failed magician at a counseling session, that's quite good.

Richard Minkley 22:50

A scarecrow and a crow. Three Kings lose sight of the star. Ha, that's great. Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Andy Barrett 22:56

Presumably they are things that people shouted out. So foreign experts, so... Okay, Geoff, Rachel, Phil, and Aide. And Justin, there were five people that performed the first show. So Rachel, of course, that's her name. Phil. Phil, of course, Phil, who also showed up that night. Justin. And Justin, so they were the five people. So the very first people that did the very first game, which was Foreign Expert. So in this game, one player delivers a speech on the subject to which he or she is renowned authority, but in a foreign language while another player is on hand to translate the speech for us. And Geoff and Rachel did the very first game.

Richard Minkley 23:42

It's interesting. We played that at the, the order we've done some stuff at the National Justice Museum, where we do a court trial and the first year we did it we did that game. So wow. Sorry, but yeah, so there's scenes from a hat.

Andy Barrett 23:53

Scenes from a hat. So that was presumably there's that list every other line. One player freely improvises to another player who's reading lines from a play. The idea being that some strange fusion occurs. We did advertisements advertisements. The next game is simply called advertisements and requires our players to advertise things which are pulled from the dictionary at random. So if I can have volunteers from the audience to flip through the dictionary and basically they would then sell the product. Remote control. So there are different channels on the TV. And the theme was subject. Old job new job, in this game- Oh, that was always a fun game- In this game one of the players in the scene must incorporate aspects of their old job into their current job. That was a fun game. A musical opera. Okay, to end part one we'd like to present a musical based on someone in the audience. So who would like to present themselves as raw material? So, your name? What your ambition is? What was the most important moment in your life? What is your favorite or most revered object? There you go. I may introduce our guests now, on guitar, lead singer, multi instrumentalist with Nottinghams finest [tropicalia] band, Zaboomba, which is our band, we had a band meeting last night, which is why I'm hung over today.

Richard Minkley 25:09

Wait, Zaboomba is still going?

Andy Barrett 25:11

We reformed.

Richard Minkley 25:12

Oh, wow.

Andy Barrett 25:14

Matt Anderson. So that was the first, our set two we start with a film trailer, the alphabet game, the most cerebral of the set, helping hands, which is just that one where you put your hand through. Video player. I'm going to leaf through this book, pick up film title. I had a big book of films, and a brief synopsis and the team had to act out. But one member had to act as remote control and fast forward, pause and rewind the film.

Richard Minkley 25:37

Mm hmm.

Andy Barrett 25:38

Whose Line is it Anyway, which is the time to use lines of dialogue that the audience have been given and I had and I gave two lines to each of the performers. And they would do a scene and then randomly pull them out and read the line. And we ended with another musical.

Richard Minkley 25:56

What's your note there?

Andy Barrett 25:57

It says Jim, to love everybody, my birth, shiny moleskin.

Richard Minkley 26:04

I thought that was gonna be something meaningful! Um, sorry.

Andy Barrett 26:07

Presumably that was Jim, was the person who we did the-

Richard Minkley 26:12

Oh, so this is the guy-

Andy Barrett 26:13

Well, I imagine so because based on those questions-

Richard Minkley 26:16

Jim, his ambition is to love everyone. His- What were the things?

Andy Barrett 26:28

The most important moment your life was his birth, most favorite or revered object is his shiny moleskin, must be his diary or something. But I could tell you what I said at the beginning. Shall I tell you what I said at the beginning?

Richard Minkley 26:40

Go on, then we might as well.

Andy Barrett 26:41

Well, I might not have said this. But this is what is written down on my script. Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. And welcome to the inaugural performance the public deflowering of mission

improbable, a troupe of people of whom you see five sitting behind me who've decided to spend time which could be occupied with more meaningful activities, say ping pong or hanging out with each other and trying, and it can be trying, to make laughter abound as though it was the very air that we breathe. Before I introduce the lovely members up here I'll briefly explain how we're going to work this thing. We're going to be doing two 30 minute sets with a half hour interval, each with a variety of games, many of which will probably be recognizable to you. I will explain each game before we start and then ask for suggestions from you for situations for scenes, lines of dialogue, film titles and the like. And then ask the performers to put succulent and witty flesh on these generously donated bones. If by any chance the scene begins to falter all over the place, which is always a possibility, of course, given the fact that nobody knows what they're going to say or do, let alone the person standing next to them when they get up, then I will rotate my crap rattle which is very loud. Okay, let's begin by briefly introducing the improvisers, they each said something, we begin the evening with a game which is called Foreign Expert! And off we went.

Richard Minkley 28:01

And off we went. Well. That's really interesting. So it seemed- I believe you said it went well. Like you said your aim was to entertain people. Do you think do you think you pulled it off?

Andy Barrett 28:18

Well, it was the first show. I'm trying to, I've got two shows in my head, that I remember...

Richard Minkley 28:24

The diary is out!

Andy Barrett 28:26

Gig one, I put not bad at all.

Richard Minkley 28:28

Not bad at all.

Andy Barrett 28:29

There you go. And that was October the 20th. Which- Malt Cross. It was Malt Cross. Okay, so the Malt Cross gig went... Yeah, it did go well. It went not bad at all. I remember we did a gig, not the next time we did a gig was at the Maze. And that was really lively. I think it's just a better venue, the Malt Cross is, it's where, you know, it's not ideal where you're placed as performers. They changed the stage since but it's always been in this odd place where it's kind of hanging in between. You're not quite as connected to the audience. Just that the way the stage is set up in the Malt Cross. The Malt Cross the city council used to run that and put bands and stuff on there. So that's probably why I used it. Yeah, yes. So it did go well. It did go well. And basically, I, you know, I kind of, we did it again, we ran another one. Another weekend. We did another gig, and then they kind of took it on and did it themselves. You know, I can't really remember. I can't remember if I did any more than just those two gigs. I might have done but they kind of decided to kind of carry on under their own steam.

Richard Minkley 29:56

Because I know that you turn up again, at the 20th anniversary, to introduce the original lineup or members of them, doing some improv games. Is there anything in that 20 year period where you have any memory of Missimp still kicking about?

Andy Barrett 30:11

Well, I think, I mean Geoff stayed in touch. And then obviously at some point when people start using Facebook, whenever that is, suddenly you're more in touch with people and hear about things, and Geoff will tell me about, "oh yeah, we're still doing, we're doing gigs here, we're doing gigs there", I remember going to see them at one of those comedy type venues down by the canal, you know, on Canal Street near via foster, all of those types of places.

Richard Minkley 30:42

Was it by any chance the Glee Club?

Andy Barrett 30:43

It might have been.

Richard Minkley 30:44

Might have been the Glee Club.

Andy Barrett 30:45

It probably was the Glee Club. And I remember going down there to see them. And again, you know, like you have Geoff going, "oh Andys in the audience! They'll have your photo taken," with everyone. So I knew they were still going. Yeah, but that's- I didn't you know, it wasn't something I kind of engaged with.

Richard Minkley 31:09

So... That's very interesting, because that means the next time you really come back into the story is just very briefly at the 20th anniversary. What was that like? Them being like, "Hey, you remember that little thing we started 20 years ago, we're still going, do want to come to the-" like, do you remember how that- What that felt like for you?

Andy Barrett 31:28

Well, obviously, if anything that is still going from something that you kind of had an idea for a long time ago, it's pleasing. It was pleasing. I was pleased that it was still going. And it was interesting seeing it, and again, I have, you know, what's interesting is when I went to the Glee Club, there was one guy who's, and I don't know if he's still involved in it, who was obviously, it seemed to me, like the kind of the main dynamic character of the group, who was very good, very funny chap. But again, a lot of it, it was, you know, at the anniversary, it was like, okay, yeah, this isn't a lot different to when we did it in terms of the quality. You know, it's all right. It's fine. He's kind of quite good. But you know, it is what it is. It's not like brilliant stuff. These people aren't fantastically funny people. They're just people that are having a go. And that's great. And because, you know, that's what it was set up for. It was an adult education course, so people will have a go. It's not about getting, you know, like Paul Merton and Josie Lawrence, you know, you might stumble across one or two people that are absolutely brilliant. But generally people are kind of just all right. And it's a bit hit and miss and the great thing about it is that it's absolutely about the audience giving, the audience have to be generous, you know?

Richard Minkley 32:58

What does that mean? Like-

Andy Barrett 32:59

Well because, you know, if you sit- If you were to- What that means is, because of the nature of the material being improvised, if the game's not quite right, or if people aren't, you know, they know the rules of it, and they know that they shouldn't block. But actually, they're, not necessarily the most creatively imaginative performers. You know, they might go into real interesting flights of fancy or will have really good comic timing, then the material is fine. But it's, you know, if it had been scripted or something you go, Ah, this is a bit crap. So the audience have to enjoy the fact that people are just doing it in the moment and be generous to that.

Richard Minkley 33:46

Yeah. That's an interesting way of describing it. So that's interesting, because I'm aware that there's talking about what the Nottingham landscape has changed for them. They started off performing in pubs. One of the things I'm interested in your perspective is that you've gone off and done both different types of community work and different types- Sorry, my eye is playing up like nobody's business today, which is unfortunate, but I've got tissues, right. So you're like, you have both a different perspective on theatre and community theatre, because the community theatre, maybe go into a little bit more detail on it. In the next sort of chunk. What do you make of the idea of like, the thing that you've set up has kind of become not just a team but the community? Like there's a lot of people doing it regularly in what is not the biggest cultural city in the country? Would you expect that to come from improv?

Andy Barrett 35:00

I had- No, no, no, I mean, no. All I was doing as far as I was concerned was running a course. And then doing a couple of shows. I mean, a similar thing has happened, which I'm aware, you know, that's happened to me in my life is that around this time, also a little bit before, somebody had set up a Samba school in Nottingham, Nottingham School of Samba. And I joined that, when it was, you know, pretty, very early on, not right at the very beginning. And so I was at a meeting last night, a band meeting, that band came out with people that were in the Nottingham School of Samba, a lot of my friends now, you know, are people that I met in the Nottingham School of Samba. So I'm aware that things that start can become things that are very important to people because if they continue, and you engage in that, your social life can be built around the people that you meet and if it continues then, you know, whatever, as you get older, you know, you may have kids, you may get married, you may, you know, whatever it might be, that those people that were part of the improvisation community or samba community, you get to know their kids, you know, these moments in which you found yourself being amongst a group of people that were like minded in a certain way can become your community that is with you for a large chunk of your life. You know, which is really nice to have that.

Richard Minkley 36:43

Because part of the thing I'm very interested in investigating this is that a lot of people get a lot of different things from Missimp because it's become a community and in the same way that improvisers can make things up just on the spur of the moment, a community you can kind of just grab things that you need out of thin air, they are the first people to come to your show. They are the first people to, if you've got a thing that you're trying to sell, they may be your first customers. They, if you're having a hard time, they're your first sort of line of defense against that kind of thing. So... I had a really good question that forgot it! No, but like... No, it's gone. Never mind. Yeah, I'm very interested in the way that community plays that role. And you were kind of describing, it's not really improv that does that. It's just things that bring people together, kind of. That's the kind of function of it. So... To put Missimp to one side for a minute, there's another part of this oral history which isn't just about improv but about Nottingham as a city. I'm trying to build a small picture of the sort of landscape that that is as a place

for art and theater. Now, you said in the early days, the Nottingham city or the Nottingham County Arts adult education thing was very good. Do you remember a particular theatre scene being alive in 1998 or a particular landscape for amateur theatre stuff?

Andy Barrett 38:30

So, Nottingham, and again, I'm lucky in that I've got a connection to this part of it as well, is that what Nottingham had, was it had a very lively live art performance scene, there was a course at Trent Polly, create, I can't remember the name of it now. Creative Arts, but it was a course that was doing a lot of theater companies that were kind of performance based theatre companies, like dogs in honey. Like, that were very much kind of connected to the forced entertainment model of performance work, performance theater work. And... Oh, what the guys that are... Gob Squad. Gob Squad came out of that. And when I finished my degree I for a year before I formed the theatre company, I worked with a guy called Dave Metcalf and another guy called Mike and we ran a thing called Live Arts in Loughborough, and we used to promote comedy cabaret. So we had people like, she was called the sea monster then, oh what's she called? Jo Brand, you know? Yeah, Jo Brand for like for 30 quid and Jeremy Hardy and Mark Steel. We used to promote them in a little room above the pub. And then we used to also promote world music in Nottingham and performance, so we had kind of interesting people like Annie Griffin, Neil Bartlett, and...

Richard Minkley 40:06

Was it still room above a pub kind of level stuff?

Andy Barrett 40:10

That was. The theater work we would put more into studio spaces. But it was very, it was part of the new emerging scene. We went bust, but the city council really wanted us to carry on doing the work because the world music stuff we were putting on at the Old Vic, which is... I can't remember what it's called now, it's the place where there's table tennis in there. It's opposite Nottingham Contemporary.

Richard Minkley 40:33

Oh, Das Kino.

Andy Barrett 40:34

Yeah, there was that they The Old Vic and we put on some amazing bands from all over the world. And because the city council wanted that to continue, they created a post, an arts officer post which Dave went on to do and I carried on the theater work. So we shared the same office, although he moved over to Nottingham at that point. And as part of that, it was partly to do with world music but partly to do a festival called, which was called contemporary archives was the name we came up with, which became the now festival. And the now festival was kind of feeding off of the work that was being done, the performance type work, to create this festival every year that had bought some really, really interesting experimental theater artists into the city. A lot of the work was very, you know, it was kind of students would go and see it. But for a period in that kind of 90s, and then Andrew Chetty took over as director of it, Nottingham had a really thriving kind of experimental theater performance art scene, and a lot of the people that did the course would stay in Nottingham and do work. So people like Jeannie Finley was on the course.

Richard Minkley 41:53

Yeah. Is she the director documentary?

Andy Barrett 41:58

Documentary filmmaking. Yeah. And so there was that going on. So in terms of a kind of thriving amateur scene, I don't really know. I mean, amateur theatre is always going on. It's always happening. But I wouldn't, you know, the story of the co op theater and all of that I have no idea what was going on around then. So... But it was a place that was very well supported by the city and the county, in terms of like adult education work. Lots of people I knew were making a living of sorts, producing whatever it might be, running workshops, doing work in schools, making shows. There were a number of theatre companies around, but really, not the extent that the kind of small scale touring theatre companies that we were in, Touch and Go, we were small scale touring theatre company, because basically what had happened was over the years with it, you know, the conservative cuts on housing benefit and dole and all that, it just became harder to sustain yourself.

Richard Minkley 43:11

Is this- This isn't trying to be party political, but there's this 1980s Tories or 2010s Tories?

Andy Barrett 43:17

This is the 80s. So, by the time you get to the kind of, you know, this period, the mid 90s, the late 90s, then that ecology of touring small scale theater is not so present, because it's just become harder to sustain that. There's kind of support networks aren't there as much. But then, you know, there was, this was at a time of the New Labour government when this was happening. So there was kind of quite a lot of, you know, for a lot of people was like Blimey, after years of living under the Tories. It was like, Oh, my god, there's now money to do stuff. You know, and it was a period and would go on to become period for a lot of people that were working in the arts in Nottingham, where there were different schemes that were bought in, there was a scheme in 2003 called creative partnerships, which pumped loads of money into schools to do arts work, where people were able to make a proper living. 2000 there was this thing called the year the artist, where again, you know, I remember myself and Jeannie actually doing a talk at the Broadway cinemas as kind of artists that were benefiting from that scheme about our work. So, it was a good time, in that way, for people that were, you know, by this time, we were in our kind of 30s. So we weren't young, but we're equally we weren't old. We were in our 30s, you know.

Richard Minkley 44:47

That's really interesting. I'm gonna put a pin in this conversation because I kind of want to know, broadly what the landscape, how it changes. Is it alright if I just pause it for a minute and quickly grab a drink of water and stuff like that, we'll just pop it on there.

b) Part 2 of 2

10th March 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

nottingham, people, community, called, improv, play, theater, project, narratives, arts, Julian, work, brilliant, city, stories, space, film, audience, spies, hall

SPEAKERS

Andy Barrett, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

Right, we are recording. This is the second part of the interview. It's 10:57 on Tuesday the 10th of March 2020. Richard Minkley interviewing Andy Barrett for the Missimp oral history project. Cool. So I was thinking, like, what is the connection between this bigger story of Nottingham as an arts city or an arts community, and this project, and for me, the idea is space. So places to put this stuff on, a sort of cultural space to do it. So in that time, we start your story at the College Street, was it the community center there?

Andy Barrett 00:32

No, College Street was the adult education space. It was the work, I think Roundabout... Because this is also the time when Nottingham has a really good tradition of theatre and education through the Playhouse, the Roundabout Theatre Company. And I think Roundabout maybe rehearse there but Alister Conquer, who- Has his name come up at all?

Richard Minkley 00:54

No, who's Alister Conquer?

Andy Barrett 00:55

Alister Conquer used to run College Street and education and arts in education in the city, you know, through schools and stuff, and was a maverick character, incredibly hard working. And you also had... Up near the Savoy cinema, I can't remember the name of it now, there was an area there that had a theater where schools were put on shows and youth theaters would put on shows and there was a big costume department from a decision to fund work, and to do things, and a commitment to the arts.

Richard Minkley 01:40

So a decision to fund work, so they decided to fund people doing the work rather than people funding spaces, do you mean, or-?

Andy Barrett 01:50

No, what I mean is the College Street was a space that was available to people, you could book it. But there was a commitment from the city to have resource available, to have costume resource available

so that schools could get costume, that there will be studios available for people to do work, that they would run adult education courses at College Street, in salsa dancing, in writing, in improvisation, in those spaces, so it was just a commitment from the city that had the money at the time to do it, to value the importance of people participating. I mean, this is the thing that's a part of it. The notion of which is obviously what is at the heart of comic improvisation and the community theater. It's about the idea that you participate. You do it, you're actually doing it.

Richard Minkley 03:12

So... Because I'm assuming there's a point then, that College Street is less available, there's less money available. When do you remember that world changing, or having changed?

Andy Barrett 03:25

Well, I'm not sure... I would, I can't really say. But obviously, the age of austerity after the banking crash, and the demise of the New Labor project was a big moment in that. I don't know what the facts and figures of at what point the Next Stage closed. I remember Next Stage closing. There was, I remember, I think it was their last event, which was some statues being made, which were set fire to. I can't remember exactly but it was out in somewhere in kind of, north of the county, and it was a kind of this really great event. And I remember because... Jane Hart is worth speaking to, if you wanted to find out more about this stuff, and Sue Crabtree who was running the Nottinghamshire side of things. I know Sue, I could ask her if she would speak to you, but she would be able to give you a much greater sense of the way that the money and the commitment and how that had to change. Because I remember when it closed down, I can't remember the year it was, but they produced this really nice glossy brochure, kind of promoting you know, saying this is what we've achieved over all the years, X amount of people participating, X amount of artists, whatever. And I know they got into a little bit trouble about that. Or I think they got into a little bit of trouble about that, because you've spent all this money making this [...] and it was like [...]. Sod you, you know? If you're going to cut us, we're gonna go out with a bang. So...

Richard Minkley 05:10

Well, literally! It sounds like they started setting fire to things!

Andy Barrett 05:12

Yeah, yeah, it was- I think that's what- I think that's what they did. I think I'm pretty sure they set fire to these things, pretty sure. That was part of it. You know, it was like they were meant to be burned. It was like some- I think what had happened was they'd taking some artists off to Spain or somewhere to see some festival where they make these large kind of sculptures that they then set fire to. It's a kind of fire festival type thing. And they commissioned some artists to work on that. So I don't know, but obviously, once you get to 2008, pretty much, you know, reasonably soon into the new century, everything changes on that front.

Richard Minkley 05:50

Yeah. This is an interesting thing, where- Because there's also your personal story, because one of the things I'm fascinated with this is obviously, that Missimp has become a community based around performance. And you start to do community theater, which is completely different, almost entirely. When did you start getting into that?

Andy Barrett 06:19

So I was into that-

Richard Minkley 06:21

Wait, you were in it very early on because you were in the plays.

Andy Barrett 06:24

Because I was in the community place.

Richard Minkley 06:25

Yeah.

Andy Barrett 06:25

So I was in it very early on. Then what happened was, after being in Touch and Go theatre company, and then working for social services, and then trying to do stuff, set myself up. I began... I think I was asked to write a place. I don't even know what the first project was. But actually... Yeah, I got a call from this woman, whose name eludes me and she said, I'm working with a group, a youth group in Bilsthorpe, I think it was Bilsthorpe. It was a mining village, ex-mining village. [...] Bilsthorpe, yep. Bilsthorpe, I think it was, Bilsthorpe. And can you put together a group of people, a group of artists to work with them? There was a guy called Ian Simons, who then went on to set up and run the Nottingham video game...

Richard Minkley 07:30

Oh, the National video game arcade?

Andy Barrett 07:33

The national video game arcade.

Richard Minkley 07:34

What was his name?

Andy Barrett 07:34

Ian Simons.

Richard Minkley 07:35

Ian Simons? Yeah.

Andy Barrett 07:36

There was Julian Hamby, who I will go on to explain more about, and Cal Green, who now lives in New Zealand. And so I asked these guys get involved because I knew them all. And we went to see these kids. And they said, We want to do something. But we don't want to do a typical play. And so they explained their ideas what they wanted to do, and we said, okay, so we made this thing. And what happened was, we invited the audience, and the audience went into the Miners Welfare and they thought they were seeing a talent show. And the talent show started and somebody called Orwig Menace, they had this shirt with Orwig Menace written on, they were the first, and Orwig Menace is going to sing country western song. And then it was a huge bang. All the lights went out on we went Oh, no, the blown fuse. Really sorry. So can you all go into the carpark? So all the audience went out to the car park, went aw, poor things, all that work that they've done. And at which point, this van kind of hurtled up the road, all these kids jumped out in like hazmat suits with loud hailers, and put Bilsthorpe under quarantine because they're being an alien invasion. Because that's what they wanted

to stage. And so we walked, we then walked around the town and all these weird things were happening, like we painted things on the walls in ultraviolet light. Like "We Are Coming" which you could see when you flash light, things were going off in windows. There was this mad scene where this group of girls had said they wanted to do called the Space Girls. So they want to do a Spice Girls song but dressed up as aliens. And it was in the middle of this field. And we said, what do you want to happen? They said, at the end we want one of our heads to blow up. So we had this, we had a scarecrow. So one of them wasn't real, it was a scarecrow. And we packed their head full of you know, we put it full of explosives. And at the end, they had to lie on the floor and one of them hadn't- Anyway, we blew it up anyway.

Richard Minkley 09:25

"We blew it up anyway!"

Andy Barrett 09:27

And it was madness. And we ended up in the in the Miners Welfare Hall. And this kind of scene acted out but you know, people rushing in with news reports and we'd have like an overhead projector or something and then at the very end of the play, we had floodlights outside all of windows. We played you know, the kind of [2001 Space Odessy theme]

Richard Minkley 09:49

2001

Andy Barrett 09:50

unbelievably loud. We kick the doors, we open the doors of the hall, flooded it full of smoke. Dry ice. It wasn't dry ice. It was like from the smoke machines, SHHHH, and just turned all these floodlights on. So it was like the mothership was- And we had the last slide was of the mothership on top of the Miners Welfare.

Richard Minkley 10:15

Wow.

Andy Barrett 10:15

So it was like, what hell was that? It was so mad. So as a result of doing that, Julian and I particularly, you know, we ended up working together. So me, Ian, and Julian did another project that was... They had a company called Wet Arts, Julian and Ian, and there was Julian, they'd gone for commission, there was a Napoleonic blast furnace that was being reopened, it'd been redone in Moira, North-West Leicestershire, and they wanted a play to reopen it. And they asked me to write it. So I wrote the play. And then I was asked by Broxtowe Borough Council, would I make a play based on the hemlock stone? And I asked Julian to work with me on that. And we formed this company called Hanby and Barrett. And basically Julian and I worked together from like, whenever that was, 2000, right through to 2014. We called ourselves Excavate around 2013. Julian left in 2014. You know, we're still going, we're still making work, still doing stuff.

Richard Minkley 11:21

And is it still that idea of community theater?

Andy Barrett 11:24

Yeah, well, the original project-

Richard Minkley 11:27

The recent one was the one where, I don't remember, but it's the book that had lots of different books, it was all jumbled together or you could read it in any order.

Andy Barrett 11:34

Yeah. So the most of the work that we did with with Hanby and Barrett was work that was the classic kind of Anne Jellicoe type thing, but not with anywhere near the amount of cast members. You know, I think we did a project at Southwell Minster which had about 100 people in, but generally they were cast of between 20 and 50 people in. But they were, what they were was they were plays generally about place, so it would be like, we might do like, the last play we did together is a good example. It was in Netherfield. And it was about the Netherfield railway history, Netherfield being a town that was built around the locomotive, about the trains and the marshaling yard. And it was a play that local people performed in. So that's, it was generally around communities, a place, but this was a period where there was money. There was more money available for funding. So we were able to, you know, get like £36,000 to do show that would happen twice. Yeah? For instance, obviously, it will be a really high quality piece of work with lots of lights and really good costumes and it will have a big audience and maybe 50 or 60 people will be involved in it. But you can't, that isn't on the table these days. So it was easier to do the work and you know, as time, you know, that is now not available. So the kind of work we do now is smaller generally, rather than these great big, big, big shows. I mean, we did some, we use a lot of pyrotechnics, and then we've done some really exciting, visually spectacular work, you know, we did one at Elston Hall about the Enlightenment because Elston Hall was the birthplace of Erasmus Darwin, who was the grandfather of Charles Darwin, and was part of the loon society, so he knew people like Joseph Priestley.

Richard Minkley 13:38

Is this in Nottingham?

Andy Barrett 13:39

This is in Nottingham, yeah. Elston Hall is near... Yeah, it's out near Newark. It's near the, there's a spa place. I can't remember exactly what it's called now. But anyway, it's just giving an example of the kind of stuff we you know, we were able to do. It was around the time that hot air ballooning had just begun, so somebody gave a speech. They were talking about hot air ballooning, the audience were all sat in front of the hall on deck chairs and stuff. And we said, Wouldn't it be lovely if we had, like, hundreds of helium balloons just going past them. So we ordered like 400 white helium balloons that will arrive. And they were at the back of the house. And then as this person was doing this speech, it was like, Ruth, balloons! On walkie talkies. On the first night we did it, it was so windy, we didn't really see them. We just saw this kind of, they literally went, FSSH. And it was just this streak. Did anyone notice the 400 white helium balloons that we've just spent £600 on, you know, but we were able to do things like that. And it was, you know, some of the, you know, if you look at the Excavate website, you can see some of that, you know, some quite spectacular work.

Richard Minkley 14:47

So, I'm interested because there's an overlap here of like, doing theater, in places with a community. What is the benefit for those people in being involved in that the thing that you were describing where you get money and you put on a big play for two performances, well, what's the community benefit?

Andy Barrett 15:11

I've always... So... I mean, I think you have to be really careful when you use the word community and what's it mean? What community is a community of place, you know, whatever. There are different projects, there are different benefits. I would say generally, those people that got involved in those projects got out of it, what they got out of it, I never really was too bothered about that. All I wanted to do when I was working with them is to give them as good a time as possible for us all together to make the best thing possible. What they got out, because as you know, you're saying about community, what you might get out of it is you meet a lifelong friend, and that might be the thing you get the most out of it. What you... We have, you know, a lot, quite a lot of these situ-, A number of situations where people would say, you know, you get a letter years later going, Oh, it changed my life, I did this and I realized I really like theater and now I'm doing this. And that's great. That's great. So those stories are there. But like I say, you know, what happens happens. I wasn't doing it to make people's lives better, I was doing because I was interested in it. I want to make good theatre. And I love working with people to make shows about their place. What it can do, if you are and it's partly about being embedded, I think and working longer term, which generally we didn't do, is it's possible that the work allows people to begin to tell different stories about the places where they live. And, so we worked in Bilborough for a long time. We went to the university in like 2006 and went-

Richard Minkley 17:02

Which University?

Andy Barrett 17:02

University of Nottingham. And we went, we're interested in what- People were writing people were... No, yeah, we went to university said, Look, we're interested in what we're doing. We're trying to work out the impact, you know, what is it we're doing? What? How is this beneficial? Is it beneficial? Because you fill out an arts application form, Yeah, this is going to be really good for the community, is it really?. And they said, Okay, well, this is interesting. We're about to build a new school, an academy in Billborough. And we don't really know the area. So we'd like to work with you. And it'll be a big research project in some ways. And we're going to fund you and we're going to give you a lot of money to be there for three years and do, or two and a half years whatever it was, and do three big plays, three big projects.

Andy Barrett 17:05

And what became, what you realize is that in an area like Bilborough, there were certain narratives about that place, certain stories. And if people don't have the space to tell their own narratives, then what happens is other people tell stories about them. And they it's very easy to for a community, a community of place to be identified by external narratives, that it's a place that's kind of rundown or it's a place for the scroungers or it's a place you know, that you don't really want to go to because it's a bit crap. And that actually, if you... And it's possible to internalize those if you live in those communities and to believe the propaganda that other people, if you're able to go, Right, let's dig into our place. And let's tell stories about the history of our place. And let's tell stories about who we are now and what we're doing. That allows people to kind of tell new stories, create new narratives, create new... To tell their own stories. Which is what community art is all about, and what community theater is all about. At the end of the day, it's about saying we have to tell our own stories because, if we don't have, if we haven't got the power to tell our own stories, then you're in trouble because other people will define you and then other people will decide what happens to you. And you know, we can't... It's not theatre that can change the world by saying, Right we can decide that we're going to get the money or we're you know, that we can't transform society. But at least people can start to begin to have their own, can get their voice back in some way, can begin to tell their own stories. And that is a

positive thing. So that the shows we did in Billborough, we were told when we started this project, nobody will come. Nobody does anything in Billborough, nobody will come. There's just all the time people, outsiders, turning up. You know, it is... What was it, a consultation fatigue, they called it.

Richard Minkley 20:03

The consultation fatigue?

Andy Barrett 20:05

Because it's an area of high need, and people turn up, they do surveys on this, that, the other, they're not interested, nobody will come to the shows. We did five shows, the first project we did five touring shows in the community. Every one was packed, it was packed, you know, and it was brilliant and people loved it. And it was ironic, it was nos- not nostalgic, it was-

Richard Minkley 20:26

What was that was that show, the first show?

Andy Barrett 20:29

It was called Road to Billborough, and it was about Billborough. It was about the history. It was about their- It had, you know, but it was also poking fun at its own... It was also poking fun at ideas of regeneration. I mean, all the work that I've done I've always tried to be provocative. Yeah, provocative and to kind of test the audience a bit. You know what I mean? We had lots of films in it. Julian was brilliant at making films that look like- It started off with this, we'd found a film, there was this old, this old public information film. And the premise of the play was brilliant, I think, was that Billborough had been chosen as an example of social working class cohesion after the war and this idyllic community being made, and we'd found the secret film about Welcome to Billborough and-

Richard Minkley 21:24

This idyllic Billborough.

Andy Barrett 21:26

Yeah. And there were some spies in Billborough that would constantly report back to their unit, See, how is life in this utopian...? Because it was a post war, you know, it was set up as a post war community. Yeah. And people arrived there and created a sense of community for themselves. So, so with- Sorry, I'll just wrap it up, but basically-

Richard Minkley 21:53

No, no, it's fascinating.

Andy Barrett 21:54

-which was really great. We got lots of old pictures of Billborough and we photoshopped in Burt and Dorothy Billborough, who were the spies, who were live- You know, they were characters. We photoshopped them into the photos.

Richard Minkley 22:10

So the spies were the spies from your play?

Andy Barrett 22:13

The spies- It told the story of Burt and Dorothy Billborough, partly who were a family who had been employed by the government to report back on how community life was going in Bilborough. And the spy, the main guy, who was very kind of upper class, fell in love with Billborough and parachuted. He said I parachuted into enemy territory. And it was this beautiful moment, because a lot of people thought the film was real. And you could see people arguing, so it's quite an older audience going, It's real, isn't it? Oh, yeah. It's a real film. No, it's a film from the 1950s! We went to a school we had all these kids doing like PE in vests and doing star jumps and stuff. So it looked like it was, you know, it's like a 50s film. But then Pete, who was the head of the Government project, he was on stage saying and I loved it. I loved it. And I was reading these reports and I parachuting then into enemy territory. And he walked off the stage with his case. And then he appears in the film, at the back of the film. You know, we've filmed with exactly the same costume on. And he's right at the back of the film, and you're noticing all these kids, and then you see, this guy's gone out, and then a little cut, and then he walks closer and closer, and he's in the film. It's like, he's literally gone into the 50s. But it was just done in like little, you know, kind of community centers and churches and stuff. But, long answer, but that kind of work, I think does have the possibility of allowing people to begin to shape their own narratives, which is really important. Nancy Fraser, American kind of critical theorist and academic, talks about recognition and the importance of recognition.

Richard Minkley 24:00

Wow. That's interesting because you talk about being a victim of someone else's narrative. And I'm thinking, well, how does that apply to Nottingham? And already you can think of Nottingham is factories shutting, mines closing, Nottingham is Shottingham, because there was a crime spree once in the 90s. And that's been how people see Nottingham now, or as people who simply don't see Nottingham. Do you think that plays a strong role in a lot of the performance communities and the performance stuff in the city? Or is that just sort of something that everyone has to deal with?

Andy Barrett 24:45

I think it's something everyone has to deal with. I think that where we are, it's really interesting. We're sat in the creative quarter. The creative quarter is a construct of the city council. My wife had a workshop here, she's a, you know, and she was kicked out of it because they, you know, they were, she was told, we're moving people out but you'll be able to come back. When she went to go back again, Oh the rents have kind of gone, you know, they're going to be four times as much. The cultural quarter is designed to try and pull in creatives, horrible word, from London, that are fleeing London, because, you know, rents are too high. So, you're always battling against different narratives that people, you know, people are trying to identify and create things. Yeah, so I mean, what you do get is, you do get... Thing is, the kind of, there was a brilliant, in Hyson Green, the Take One studios, I think they're still going, Courtney Rose and his brother, I think, they run like kind of, been doing brilliant work with kids, their dance workshops, music workshops. And that's... They're not trying to change the perception, they're trying to change the reality of people [who lives] there, because they're trying to say to the kids, come and do some workshops, come and learn how to be a street dancer, if you're going to learn to be a street dancer. You know, they care about these kids, and they want them to be street dancers because they want to give them opportunities to express themselves in ways that they may not be able to otherwise, which may end up with them doing stuff that you know, is not good and ends up with them being locked up or something. So it's not that they're trying to change the narrative. They're trying to change the reality of you know, so there's that kind of work that goes on.

Richard Minkley 26:40

Because it's interesting because we've, it's been beautiful, we veered wildly away from improv, but it feels like improv falls much more into that second story you were telling where it's sort of like giving people things to do, rather than telling a particular story, which is that different kind of theater you were describing? Yeah, I mean, this is the weird part of this interview because it's veered away from oral history and more towards just talking about the general state of things. But do you see something like Missimp, where you've gone from having five people in the Malt Cross 20 years ago, to now at any given point, you could have 100 or something people engaged with Improv in a given month or week or something? How do you see that in this grander thing of people using theatre to make to make their lives better? Like, it's one of the weird things I'm like, I don't know how to describe that in terms of what is going on there. For a community, for places like Nottingham.

Andy Barrett 27:54

I have no idea. I mean, you know, it's like salsa dancing, you know, it's called a samba, it's a thing that is popular. Why is it popular? It's popular because anybody can do it, because people get excited about doing it. It's fun. Exactly. It's fun. And you meet people, and it's as much about the social-ness of it as it is about the art form or whatever you want to call it. So I think it's, you know, it's just something that as a practice that... I presume, you know, it's a bit like what happened at Nottingham School of Samba, I presume, is that once you do it, if you like it, and you commit to it, it's something that becomes something that you know you want to keep doing. Because as with Samba, it's a rhythm. There's a kind of rhythm to it and it gets in your bones and people stick, you know, even if they leave the school of samba, if they go back again 20 years later, and pick up a drum, they'll get it. They've got it, they've absorbed it. With, presumably, I don't know, but presumably with improvisation, it's that thing of saying yes.

Richard Minkley 28:10

Because it's fun.

Andy Barrett 29:04

Once you go, yeah, okay, I'm doing something where I'm turning up, and I'm saying yes. Then you go, Well, of course, I want to say yes, I want, I don't want to be a person that says no anymore. I want to be a person that says yes. And I'm with a group of people and we can say yes, and experiment with saying yes, in this safe space. You know, and it might be that them saying yes, in a safe space, I hate that word, safe space, but you know, in a rehearsal space, has impacted on their life outside of that, because they might have said, yes, you know, that was the great line in Keith Johnstone, people that say yes are rewarded by the adventures they have in life. And people that say no rewarded by the safety that they gather around them, you know, and it may be that this kind of work, you become evangelical about it, because you go you know what, it's about saying, Yes. And that is, that's not just kind of a practice, but it's a view on life. I'm going to keep, I want to stick with.

Richard Minkley 30:02

I suppose there's also as well if you surround yourself with people who are willing to accept your ideas and you as a person, that also has a powerful affect in that evangelical way. It's like you know, if you come here and you are not a cis white man, someone was describing it as that there's no problem that there's no black roles in improv. There's no female roles. There's no roles for people with wheelchairs. It's like, if you're there, there is a role for you. Because the whole thing is like, you know, accepting things, accepting offers, not putting up barriers, breaking down those barriers, which is exactly what was in your first lesson plan. I noticed at the top, learning outcomes. Where is it? They will learn to trust their first ideas and realize that good improvisation is not a battle about who can be the most

witty, but how to engender a situation where ideas can flow freely and quickly and take on a life of their own, they will learn the basic rules of improv. Yeah. Is that, wait, there's a word liberate I just saw. Sorry, I am terrible at reading. Um, but yeah, it's, I don't know, I'm just talking now, which is not what this interview was meant for. But yeah, it's just an interesting thing to see that, that simple idea of "yes, and", of I recognize you and I accept it and I build on that. It is a fundamentally sound way of starting that community, it is a good basis for people turning up having a good time and goes from there. And it's a good basis for living your life. Yeah, yes.

Andy Barrett 31:40

Which is why it grows, which is why similarly, if you're into music, playing drums together, and kind of you know, it's a good way to live your life, which is why people do it, because it's a healthy thing. People understand the healthiness of it. It is a healthy outlook. It's a positive thing. So that, you know, it's an infectious thing.

Richard Minkley 32:03

I'll be honest, I'm running out of questions that need covering. I suppose to round us off then, to return to this idea of the space that is Nottingham, and the cultural space that is Theatre in Nottingham. What do you think the state of play is today? Because it's around about the mark where I mean, it was a year or two ago that this project is supposed to end, but where we are now, what's the state of theatre in Nottingham at the minute?

Andy Barrett 32:33

Well...

Richard Minkley 32:34

I appreciate it's probably a big question, but...

Andy Barrett 32:36

I mean, I don't know, is the- I mean, what happened in Nottingham was partly the creative arts course, if it was called Creative Arts, at the Trent, closed. A good few, a long time ago now.

Richard Minkley 32:50

Yeah?

Andy Barrett 32:51

And that had a real impact on the type of work I was talking about, the kind of reckless sleepers gob squad kind of work. The Now festival stopped. There is... I mean, obviously you've got Non Such. So you have in Nottingham, which I can't remember there being before, a theatre company that has its own building, that's not a major Theatre Company.

Richard Minkley 33:19

The Theatre Royal or the Play House basically.

Andy Barrett 33:21

Yeah, The Theater Royal and Play House, and you know, they are same as same as doing their stuff. Increasingly, there is a, which partly comes from funding demands, that the kind of connection to the community, is something that the Play House, they do... Roundabout is no longer there, I believe, it's a separate organization, but they do a lot, you know, they have a lot of community based work. I think

that's partly driven by the fact they have to do it, but it's probably, it may not be that, it might be because they have a total commitment to doing that kind of work. But fundamentally that is, you know, a theater doing its thing, with its kind of outreach program. Amateur theater, I mean, the lace market seems to be doing, you know, does good work, you know.

Richard Minkley 34:15

It's still kicking about.

Andy Barrett 34:16

Still kicking about. You've got Non Such. Yeah, it's probably in reasonably good shape.

Richard Minkley 34:24

It's alive at least, I suppose.

Andy Barrett 34:25

It's alive at least, yeah. I mean, I don't... There are companies in Nottingham, there's the Gramophones Who, you know, who do work, really great work. I mean, they're... Ria who does the aerial workshop thing just round the corner. So, there are, you know, there are people doing stuff.

Richard Minkley 34:48

Hm. Yourself, Excavator.

Andy Barrett 34:51

Yeah, yeah, I was still doing stuff. So it's still there. That stuff's still there, stuff's still happening. But it's harder, I think, it's harder because what's missing is the infrastructure and the commitment that a city can provide, and what Nottingham is really bad at, is its arts, the City Council Arts Department. I mean the one thing, you know, we're a decent sized city, and we don't do- We do very few really good things here in terms of kind of large scale arts events. There was for a short time the Nottingham European and Arts Theatre Festival, which started, was really good, but then kind of vanished. We have Light Night, which is kind of embarrassing in terms of what it actually is able to present. You know, you just get thousands of people wandering around the city, which is brilliant because it's like a takeover of the city, by families looking for stuff to do, because there's nothing, you know, you walk into the castle grounds and there's like a box of matches on fire on the, you know, on a chair and that's it. Cus the Council has commissioned four pieces of work at £50 each or something, you know, it's just rubbish. It's rubbish. So that's what's-

Richard Minkley 36:08

There's no exploding Spice Girls from space.

Andy Barrett 36:11

No, there isn't, and there isn't the city, you know, I know they're under colossal pressures, but there isn't a really good city council led commitment to the Arts in the City I don't think, and I know, I mean I think they cut, there was a big cut, of the Nottingham Playhouse's budget, I think and... So that's, that's really essential. And that's partly about, when you talk about community in cities, you know, those are the kind of things that can help define a city. I mean, obviously Nottingham got the City of Literature thing, so... And that's been great for the city. And it's let the city council off the hook a little bit, because it gives it an identity. Ooh look, Nottingham, Nottingham, that's its identity. It's a City of Literature. Great. We've got Byron, we've got Lawrence, Sillitoe. It's like God, you know, I know. But

around that it's doing brilliant work, the City of Literature is brilliant thing, and the push, you know, the fact that the library is going to have, like this big kids library, as part of it is brilliant. And the commitment to literacy from the city council is great. I'm not knocking it at all, on that level.

Richard Minkley 37:29

I suppose it's how do you support without the money?

Andy Barrett 37:32

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 37:33

Which is fascinating because we were talking about Light Night. One of the things that happened in Light Night was order improvise trial, which is where a bunch of improvisers would put on a trial, which was, I mean, I directed the one that we did this year, but, so I am a little bit biased, but it was a really good show, but we just couldn't, it's kind of too far out the way, we couldn't get people in. But, again, it's like you don't need to give an improviser £50. It feels like one of the interesting dynamics of improv versus other theater is like, for a great improv show, £50 might be wasted on an improv show because they can do it brilliantly for free sometimes. Yeah. So it seems interesting that as theater struggles to survive, improv has always been struggling to survive. So it's almost now that times are tough, improv has an advantage because it's got these inbuilt structures where, you know, they've been trying to survive, and they've learned to survive. And all of a sudden, when everybody else is at their level, they have a couple of advantages. They can do really fun shows for cheap, and if everything goes wrong, you can laugh at it, which is the point. It's like, even if everything goes absolutely terribly, it's still hilarious because it's gone horribly wrong and you can laugh at the people and that's part of the deal. I have basically run out of questions to ask you a long while ago, you can probably tell. But is there anything else you want to add before we wrap up and move on?

Andy Barrett 39:11

No, I don't think so. I mean, obviously, it's kind of weird, the fact that, I mean, I do quite a lot of work that is Heritage Lottery funded. Oh, there you go set one. It's got the list of who did- I'm going to leave this stuff with you.

Richard Minkley 39:27

Yes!

Andy Barrett 39:28

That's what I'm fiddling around with at the moment.

Richard Minkley 39:30

I'm going to put all this on Facebook.

Andy Barrett 39:32

So that's kind of weird. Don't put my type stuff up on Facebook, but you can take it for your project.

Richard Minkley 39:38

Okay, so don't post it. I almost got away with it too. Fair enough. But I can put this stuff on Facebook, but not this stuff.

Andy Barrett 39:44

Well, maybe you can. Maybe you can. Let me know. Show me first.

Richard Minkley 39:51

Okay.

Andy Barrett 39:51

Say, I'm gonna put this up and this up, and it's great that this falls within the remit. I did a Heritage Lottery Fund project that was based on a rock concert in 1967 in Spalding, and it was great that they funded that, the HLF. But it's kind of weird because of the word heritage.

Richard Minkley 40:13

Yeah.

Andy Barrett 40:13

And something that started, you know, that I was part of starting, has now moved over into this...

Richard Minkley 40:22

This is a history project, not necessarily a Theater Project.

Andy Barrett 40:25

Yeah. Absolutely. So you can have all of this for now, I was just seeing if there's anything you couldn't have, but the answer is no. So-

Richard Minkley 40:33

Well, in that case, I will stop recording, and we'll carry on with our lives. Thank you for your time.

3. Marilyn Ann Bird

3.1. Interview 1 of 1

a) Part 1 of 2

3rd March 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

improv, Geoff, people, Arts Theatre, point, Nottingham, Justin, called, gig, arts, Nick, bit, Ross, improviser, interested, games, drama, robin hood, pub, remember

SPEAKERS

Marilyn Ann Bird, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley - 00:00

So we are recording. For the record, it is Tuesday, 3rd of March 2020 at 28 minutes past 2. Oh, I know, an exciting time of day. I am Richard Minkley interviewing Marilyn Ann Bird.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 00:17

Yes

Richard Minkley - 00:18

I got the full name right and Marilyn is pleased.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 00:21

Yay

Richard Minkley - 00:22

And we are doing this for the improbable missions oral history project. So first question, what is your first memory of Missimp?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 00:37

God. My first memory, probably the first time I met the guys from it. I got involved with Missimp through a friend of my partners who knew one of the guys in Missimp and she said they were looking for people to join. And Nick mentioned it to me because I was working in a really dull administrative job at the university, and was desperate to perform. So I went. So I had this email address. I emailed a guy called Justin Gould. And he said, "Do you want to come along and meet everyone and when we can have a chat about what you do, see where we go from there". So I went met them. I think it was someone like the Alley Cafe.

Richard Minkley - 01:18

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 01:19

And it was me and a guy called Clayton Fussell. And we both tipped up there and just had a chat with Geoff and Justin and a guy called Ade. And they seemed very nice and they said, "Oh do you fancy coming doing some improv with us?" And we went, "Yeah, all right". And that was pretty much it.

Richard Minkley - 01:38

Did you know Clayton beforehand, or?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 01:40

No.

Richard Minkley - 01:40

No?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 01:40

Not at all, no. He was doing his PhD. He was attached to the Institute Hearing Research at the University and then he got into, through Missimp, he got into acting, absolutely loved it. Then he ditched his PhD and went to drama school off the back of it. So Missimp has destroyed at least one PHD in its lifetime.

Richard Minkley - 02:01

Oh, wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 02:02

Yeah. And then from the acting, he loved doing the acting and all that kind of stuff. And then from there, he's gone on to being a director, which is really, really cool. So you know, it's destroyed a PhD, but it's created a directing career.

Richard Minkley - 02:16

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 02:17

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 02:17

Okay. So just to double check, you said, who introduced you to Missimp because you said it was...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 02:22

It was, so my partner Nick was working at probation and someone he knew at probation knew Justin Gould, who was one of the founder members of Missimp. And he said... Nick said he wasn't interested at the time. Little did he know. And then he got this email address from her and I emailed Justin. and it all sort of snowballed from there.

Richard Minkley - 02:47

That's interesting. Um, do you remember anything of that first meeting?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 02:53

I remember...

Richard Minkley - 02:55

So I've heard, I've heard different stories. Was it... You say it might have been Alley Cafe. I heard it might have been Pit and pendulum. Do you...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 03:04

I think I don't think the Pit and Pendulums old enough to have been there.

Richard Minkley - 03:09

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 03:10

Because that was another pub and it was a really, really rough pub at the time. So I don't think it was there. But I just remember, Geoff sort of hunkered down. He does this great thing where he sort of hunches his shoulders and looks at you very, very intently when he's interested and excited by things. And he was doing that and doing the whole kind of nodding and everything and got Justin who's has this remarkably curly hair, and quite strong Kiwi accent as well.

Richard Minkley - 03:38

I've heard, so, Justin was also, there was, for some reason, there was several Kiwis dotted throughout the history of Missimp.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 03:44

Yes. Oh, yes. And I've got a great story about one of the other ones.

Richard Minkley - 03:48

Well, we will wait until we bump into a story.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 03:52

Yeah, but it was basically those three guys and me and Clayton, I think at the same time, and then from there we went to rehearsing on Saturday afternoons in Justin's front room, in his house in Forrest fields. And we used to go from, usually we'd finish the rehearsal and then go somewhere like the Grosvenor for a drink afterwards.

Richard Minkley - 04:12

So, that's interesting, because that is quite a different way to how Missimp works at the minute.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 04:18

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 04:21

I'm interested in what was the, what was the deal there? Because it's sort of like, there was, it was almost like... You emailed them. You had a meeting. Do you remember what the discussion was? Or whether there was like...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 04:34

I think it was all the basic stuff about, so, "So have you done any improv before?" and I said, Yes. And they said, "Oh, what sort of improv do you like?" And I think I probably named dropped Whose Line Is

It Anyway? Because of course, that was most people over here's introduction to improv, absolutely loved that show when I was at sixth form. And, it was just, it was just sort of a general friendly chat and sort of asking what sort of improv I knew and things like that? And they said, "Oh, well, what sort of games do you know?" And I mentioned a handful and they sort of went "oh, haven't heard of those ones."

Richard Minkley - 05:10

Do you remember what those games were?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 05:12

Not off the top of my head, there was the shop game, which we used to do.

Richard Minkley - 05:17

What was the shop game?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 05:17

The shop game is so contrary to the spirit of improv. Because the whole deal, an improvisation exercise we used to use at The New Theatre at Nottingham University. And the idea is someone is trying to return something to the shop but the shopkeeper has to come up with as many inventive excuses for not returning it as they possibly can. And I remember doing one that I think Geoff probably still remembers, which was, I think was the first one I did with them, which was where I had to return... What was it, I think it was a mini with a light, with a burning hoop on the top that Tigers jumped through something like that. It was just, it was, it was bonkers. And but the whole point of it is that you've got one person is basically coming up with a million different ways to say no. Which as we know is bad improv.

Richard Minkley - 05:18

Bad improv.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 06:12

Bad improv.

Richard Minkley - 06:15

That's interesting. So do you remember at what point in your life this would have been? And I'm aware that this may be not the specific date, but...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 06:24

It was either 2000 or 2001? Because it was when I was working at the University of Nottingham in the graduate school, I worked there two different points

Richard Minkley - 06:34

Ok.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 06:35

With about a nine month gap between them. So I would have been about 21, 22. So I've been, I've been in Missimp for almost half my life.

Richard Minkley - 06:48

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 06:48

Which is kind of terrifying.

Richard Minkley - 06:52

No, no, this is...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 06:52

There are many other things I could have done with my time but that's what I chose.

Richard Minkley - 06:56

No, this is the exciting thing because there's some interesting stuff to find out. So It's early 2000s.

Yeah. What do you remember those early days? Because obviously, well, they kept, they let you in.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 07:08

Yeah. Not entirely sure why I think it... I think they were just. It was. It had come to the point with Missimp for them where, they'd gone from having, I think eight or nine different people down to about I think it was down to the sort of core three, which was Geoff, Adey and Justin. And I think it was at that point where it was just like, we need to get more people in otherwise there's not much point as carrying on with this.

Richard Minkley - 07:33

Yeah. You made a little bit of a face when you were remembering that.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 07:37

Yeah, it was, it was one of those things were slight. I wasn't sure why they let me in. I'm kind of glad they did. But it's just I don't know what the sort of reasoning was behind it. I think I probably just turned up and they went, "Oh, yeah, she'll do".

Richard Minkley - 07:52

Yeah, that's, so yeah. Do you remember? You were rehearsing in... Sorry, i'm just faffing with my notes. You were rehearsing in Justin's living room on a Saturday. Yeah. Do you remember what gigs you did? Or what gigs were, the team where doing? Or the group?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 08:07

Oh, well, the gigs were very, very intermittent and it was generally whoever Geoff could talk into putting us on somewhere. So it wasn't like we were, you know, going straight out into a residency or anything like that. I remember doing gigs, places like the maze.

Richard Minkley - 08:23

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 08:23

On Mansfield road, when that was still a thing. God, I still miss it. But it was it was really odd because it was like a really small sort of back room that had a raised stage. And I don't think the management had assumed that we get any audience in and we packed the place out. No idea why. No idea how.

Hadn't really done any advertising for it. The bouncer that we had on the door enjoyed it so much that he waived his fee for the evening. Which was awesome.

Richard Minkley - 08:55

Was that your first gig?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 08:57

Yeah, I think it was.

Richard Minkley - 08:58

Do you remember anything else about that night, other than it was the maze, it was packed and the bouncer was happy?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 09:03

Yeah, um, it was. I think there's some footage of it somewhere I'm pretty sure Geoff recorded it because he liked sort of filming stuff that we did. I do remember there was one scene that I started with, "What are you doing?" Again bad improv.

Richard Minkley - 09:21

Bad improv.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 09:22

But we used to do, it was also short form games and stuff. So we used to do one that's called police report which was all talking in one voice which was about you know, we'd get a crime from the audience and we do like a police report about it. Speaking all in one voice and things like that.

Richard Minkley - 09:41

When usually speaking all in one voice. What does... -

Marilyn Ann Bird - 09:43

Speaking at the same time, it's all...

Together(ish) - 09:46

Saying the same thing. So you're talking really slowly.

Richard Minkley - 09:54

This is going to be so weird on the transcription.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 09:56

Yeah, it just sounds like you're underwater. It's really weird. But it was lots of things like that. I think that was my first gig. Its basically if someone asked us to do a gig we'd go and do it. We did a show very randomly it was, I think it was The Bakewell Festival . I think that was that was a few years later though.

Richard Minkley - 10:17

It rings a bell. What do you think The Bakewell Festival was?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 10:19

It was, because we were in a room above the Bakewell Pudding shop.

Richard Minkley - 10:25

That is a wonderful start to a story, by the way.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 10:27

Yeah. There was nowhere to warm up. So we were warming up outside on the grass verge next to the road, which was a bit random. But that was another one where it's just, where they didn't expect very much of it, and then we packed the room out which was amazing. And it's like, all those early gigs where you had a full room were just phenomenal. And it was just, it was just the sort of excitement of that was amazing. But then we also did things like The Buxton Fringe where we were in Buxton Town hall and we ended up with six people in the audience, and you could have heard a pin drop throughout it. But you know, it's just it's just one of those things. And that was one where we'd actually gone, I think it was either the weekend before at the very beginning of the festival. We'd gone and flyer'd people in the park at their big like opening festival thing. So I thought oh, yeah, no, this will be great. This will be great. And it was just like, no one turned up. No one.

Richard Minkley - 11:19

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:19

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 11:20

Is that still, its early 2000s? Was that all in the space of like, because you've said the maze, Bakewell festival, I don't remember the festival you just mentioned.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:30

Buxton Fringe.

Richard Minkley - 11:30

Buxton Fringe.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:31

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 11:32

Was that all in the first year or so?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:34

I... no. The Buxton Fringe definitely wasn't because that was after Ross had joined us. Ross Parrish, if you're, if you're looking to write down names.

Richard Minkley - 11:45

I'm aware of a man called Ross Parrish.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:47

Yes, him and his amazing chin. Yeah. No, he and I used to basically do this whole bit where we were both, because we've both got quite pointy chins, we used to do this whole bit where we both Bruce Forsyth. And that kind of became our thing. But he was, he was someone, he became part of Missimp before Nick became part of Missimp, which I think was maybe a couple of years into it.

Richard Minkley - 12:13

Ok.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 12:13

I don't know, again, it is very, I'm very, very hazy on dates for it.

Richard Minkley - 12:17

So that's very interesting. So how did you, touched on it, but why did you get involved in Missimp at that time?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 12:26

I was desperate to perform. My whole plan was go to university do the degree I said I would do to keep my parents happy. Which was French and German. Which was you know, supposed to be a useful degree which I've barely used since. But the whole plan was go to university, then work for a year, then go to drama school. What happened was I went to university, I worked for several years after that, I had a massive nervous breakdown, and then I went to drama school. But at that point with Missimp, it was, it was basically the first group of people that had said, "Oh, you want to perform, come and perform with us." So its just like, so, I did. And it was great. And I was just like, it was basically it was just us messing about in someone's living room one afternoon a week, and then occasionally doing whatever shows, Geoff had managed to scare up from wherever, from his like encyclopedic, kind of, networking knowledge of people and places and stuff.

Richard Minkley - 13:29

Which was? How did, that's interesting, so how did the team... I don't want to say how did the team work, but like, was it basically Geoff, like you said, scared up some performances, you rehearsed on a Saturday afternoon and then went to the pub, is that...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 13:46

that was pretty much it. There was a point, and again, this is probably about, I don't know, maybe three, four years in where we were just like, "yeah, we want to perform more. So we'll try and get a residency." So we tried to get residency with a place called Junction Seven. Which was demolished and turned into flats. Which was a bar. And the plan was we do monthly shows up there. And we did a couple that were very well attended. And then we did one that coincided with, I think it was, Oasis at The Arena. So it'll be, it will be, you know, after The Arena was built to give you some idea of time. And, and we, I think we had about four people in the audience. And one of those was Ross's wife, and one of them was Geoff's wife. So the manager basically went... At the end we said, "Oh, we'll be back next month" and the manager went "No you won't. I'm putting an end to this." Okay, wow, Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 14:49

Thats harsh.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 14:51

Yeah. So that was just like, errgh. So then we went back to sort of trying to scare up gigs here, there and everywhere. We tried a gig, We tried sort of doing slots at a place, I can't remember what it used to be called. It's now, I think it was The Pelican club that backs on to the Adam's building of New College Nottingham. And that was just like we were, we were there and we were performing, but it was a pub and no one was interested. So we were like on stage next to the Christmas tree that they shoved into the corner trying desperately to do improv, while everyone ignored us. And things like that. And it was just like and it went, sort of like, through a lot of peaks and troughs, where sometimes it's like... You turn up and do a gig and everyone would love it. And you know, you have a full room, feel great. And then there'd be those odd gigs where you like turn up and no one's interested, whatsoever. And those are.

Richard Minkley - 15:43

That's... That is a really tough environment to be performing in.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 15:49

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 15:51

What was that like for you? Because one of the things I'm interested in is why people keep going. Why did you stick at it in those tough gigs? I feel like it's a bit of a blunt question but.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 16:03

Yeah, I don't, I don't know. I mean, it was just, we said we would come and do this thing, so we went and we did this thing. And also, I mean, like Geoff's so enthusiastic about things. And he's just so good at just going, "No no. We'll keep going. We'll keep going. We'll keep going." And it's just like, "Yep, yep, fine." And it's just like, at that point, Geoff was in charge of absolutely everything. So it's just like, Geoff said, we were doing a gig, we were doing a gig. And he'd normally have his like, you know, he had one of those sort of, like, minivan things. So it's like, you know, he'd say he'd pick, because he was living Mansfield at the time, so he'd say, "Oh, well, I'll come and I'll pick everyone up in the..." And it was like you're going on a school trip in this like little mini bus full of improvisers, you know, going out to Buxton, or Bakewell or wherever. And there was also a point where, when we had, when we introduced a musician to it as well which was which was...

Richard Minkley - 16:06

Wait wait wait wait wait. You introduced a musician?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 16:59

There was a musician. Yeah. And I got a couple of other people involved. I got Ross Parrish involved after randomly, he'd finished his master's degree and was still hanging around Nottingham, was just bored and looking for things to do. I bumped into him Beeston bus station one afternoon, and said, "Oh, hi, Ross. How you doing". gave him my number, so he could ring me and then I said, "Oh, I'm doing this thing you might be interested in. It's called mission" because it's called mission improbable at the time rather than Missimp. "Oh, you might be interested in this. I'm doing all this like improv comedy stuff." Because at that point, he was going, Oh, I'm thinking about maybe like becoming a comedy writer. He's now head of biology at Loughborough Grammar School, but you know. so I knew...

Richard Minkley - 17:42

Its a great punch line.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 17:43

Yeah, I knew, I knew he was funny. And I knew he'd get on with everyone, and he'd do a lot of, like, funny stuff with us. And then I introduced, I think, basically Nick got bored of having every Saturday afternoon to himself and me disappearing. And so I introduced him to it. And then, we got hold of this amazing guy called Simon Dumbleton who had his own keyboard, liked making stuff up, was very good at standing with his finger poised to both fart key, just in case things were going badly. Because, you know, a fart noise will make people laugh regardless. And but through him we started doing like little sort of musical bits and bobs within it. And I remember once because he was, he lived in Sheffield. Of course it was expensive for him to come from Sheffield to Nottingham every week. One weekend, we said "oh, well, we'll come to you". And it ended up with Nick in the boot of Geoff's smart car, in a fetal position, as we drive up to Sheffield round all these like little twisty tiny roads. We get out of a... We get Nick out of the boot of the smart car where he's been hiding because we saw a police car on the motorway and just though, "better keep your head down." We get there and hes just like, sort of totters out, and he's just sort of reeling with travel sickness because he's like been curled up in the boot of the smart car for over an hour.

Richard Minkley - 19:10

So, a musician implies musical improv?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 19:15

Yeah, we were doing sort of little bits of it, not like massive amounts. And it was more kind of under scoring and things like that. I struggled to remember any of the musical stuff we actually did with Simon. I just remember having a whale of a time with him and him being a lot of fun and being, sort of, pretty much ready for anything. But I can't remember any of the specific sort of musical bits and bobs that we did. Because I know Geoff was very interested in the idea of getting more musical stuff in there, because I think he'd seen Baby Wants Candy by that point. So, and they're like, they are the people who basically invented the improvised musical over in Chicago, they're absolutely phenomenal.

Richard Minkley - 19:58

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 19:58

And I also love them because, Nick and I, the summer that we got together we were doing a show called The Robin Hood Revue the Edinburgh Festival. And we shared a venue with Baby Wants Candy.

Richard Minkley - 20:10

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 20:11

Yeah. It was...

Richard Minkley - 20:12

The Robin Hood Revue.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 20:13

Yeah, it was terrible.

Richard Minkley - 20:14

What's the Robin Hod Revue?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 20:16

The Robin Hod Revue was the Robin Hood story done in, I think, four different styles. And it was, it's about as good as it sounds, to be honest. And I was playing the Sheriff of Nottingham, Nick was playing Prince John, and that was the summer that we got together. So that's where our whole relationship blossomed. But because we were sharing...

Richard Minkley - 20:34

In the Robin Hod Revue.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 20:35

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 20:35

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 20:36

Yeah. Because we were sharing a venue with Baby Wants Candy, they gave out, to all the acts that were on at the same venue, they would give out a certain number of free tickets every week. So we basically went and saw Baby Wants Candy almost every night for a fortnight and just went "oh my god, this is amazing". And they were, they were absolutely phenomenal.

Richard Minkley - 20:58

So I feel like I need to address the elephant in the room, which is, Nick was about but wasn't an improviser.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 21:05

Yeah, he...

Richard Minkley - 21:06

So, in the continuity of the interview. He, he is a prominent member of the community at the moment.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 21:10

He is Yeah. He came along to a lot of shows and stuff. And I said, "Well, why don't you get involved" and he was like "mmmm, no really sure". And then, because it would be a thing that we could do together on the weekends, because otherwise, it's just like, you know, I disappeared one day a week, and he's, you know, like, sat on his own doing whatever it was he did, probably, at that point. Probably watching episodes of Beast Wars back to back. But, it was just like, it was a thing that we could do together. And I thought you'd enjoy it. And I thought it'd be good at it. And I knew he was funny, from the sort of stuff that we've done before because we'd done things like, we did a comedy review at the university and stuff and we were in each other's sketches and things like that. So, you know, I said, "Well, why don't you come and get involved" and he's like, "okay, I'll give it go". Started coming along to rehearsals, and everything. And then just sort of got involved and was performing with us on a regular basis, which is really cool.

Richard Minkley - 22:05

So I could sit in here, I could do, easily do a two hour conversation about the Robin Hod Revue. But...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:10

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 22:11

To put it into a bit of context. So there's the Robin Hod Revue. You Nick get to know each other. You get into Missimp. How long, because it feels like then there is a kind of... A kind of, not scheduled, but something set up where, you're basically rehearsing once a week at Justin Goulds house.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:32

Yep.

Richard Minkley - 22:34

Getting gigs when you can.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:36

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 22:37

It's the early 2000s.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:38

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 22:38

How long did that go on for?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:42

Oh, God, I have no idea. But I think, well, actually, things started to change because people moved away. We lost Simon Dumbleton to working at, I think it was a needle exchange in Manchester. And then Justin decided he was going to move to Edinburgh, which is where his sister was living at the time. And where he met his wife and where they've had their children and all that kind of stuff. So you know.

Richard Minkley - 23:09

Where they live.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 23:09

Yeah. Where, where he also worked with drug addicts. I don't know what it was about Missimp but going and working with people with...

Richard Minkley - 23:17

Needles.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 23:18

With addiction issues, but that was very much it. And I think it might have been at that point, there was still, it was still me, Geoff, Nick, Clayton, possibly Ross at that point. So it was just like, we couldn't, obviously, Justin moves, we can't rehearse in his living room because it's now someone else's. Geoff did his usual thing of like going "well, you know, where can we go? What can we do", which is really cool. And he found us some rehearsal space at The Arts Theatre in Nottingham, in their sort of top room and we started rehearsing there. And, you know, we put up a poster on their members board saying, oh, we're doing this, we're doing this improv, you know, come along and join in. No one from The Arts Theatre ever came, as far as I know. And we were rehearsing there for quite a few years. And then it was just like, there was there was a massive hole in the roof. There were holes in the floor. At this point, when, if you're in a show at The Arts Theatre, you had to act around the buckets, because there was such a big hole in the ceiling. So when they did, I think it was Brassed Off there, They were literally acting around the buckets because it was pouring with rain and it was just sheeting down through the building. So it's just like and then the top room just kept getting filled with props and costumes and things. So we working in a smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller space. It was also at the Arts [Theatre] where we used as an alibi for someone. This random guy turned up with his girlfriend one night. And then a few weeks later, Geoff got a letter from the police saying "This man says he was at this place at this time with you. Can you confirm or deny this?" So Missimp has also been used as an alibi for some crime. I've no idea what the crime was. And I, it's probably best not to think about it. But

Richard Minkley - 25:16

I'm gonna have to look up that crime, now.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 25:17

Yeah. But it was like, at that point, it wasn't, it didn't feel like there was massive commitment to it because it's like, some weekends, you know, me and Nick couldn't be bothered, or Clayton couldn't be bothered, or Geoff couldn't be bothered. And it was just, it got down to this very sort of small group again. And then occasionally we'd get other people who would come along, and which is really, really nice. I think that might have been when we acquired, Rupes, might have come along with a couple of ones that The Arts Theatre. or I may have made that up in my head.

Richard Minkley - 25:50

We'll have to double check with him.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 25:51

Yeah, there was also, I think that's also when we encountered Ellen Spaeth who was really good fun, who again moved to Edinburgh. I don't know was it is about people involved in Missimp moving to Edinburgh, but it's clearly a thing. And, you know, we just had like, we had people who sort of dropped in and dropped out quite quickly, but it didn't feel like there was a massive team of us. But we're still pushing and trying to get as many gigs as we could. Once Ross has got involved, we ended up doing a charity gig, I think, for Red Nose Day for the hairdresser's that Ross's wife Kirsty works for where instead of doing, if you're familiar with game guess the crime, we did guess the haircut.

Richard Minkley - 26:32

Ok, there's two things here. One, what's guest the crime?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 26:34

Guess the crime. When we did the original iteration of the, Order! The Improvised Trials at [The National] Justice Museum, where the judge has to guess what the crime is, and the, you've got two people who are coaching him through to figure out what the crime was. That's guess the crime. But because this is for a hairdressers, we did guess the haircut. And Geoff was the guesser and not to speak ill of him, but, he was struggling quite a lot. And he decided that the actual name of a haircut was a monkey perm. And it was one of those things that I don't think we ever let him forget. But it was just like, it was again, it was just things of random bits and bobs here and there.

Richard Minkley - 27:23

So was that time at The Arts Theatre, because it feels like a big step up in some ways, because you've moved into a theater space rather than a pub or a back room. It sounds like you're doing the same thing.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 27:36

Yeah, it was, it was very much like we were, you know, because we said, "Oh, well, you know, we'll run this and any money that we make will donate to you, will donate to The Arts Theatre", hoping, you know, that that meant that people from The Arts Theatre would go to members of The Arts Theatre, "Oh, there's this improv thing going on, go on and go and see that" and that didn't happen. So we gave them like, a few pounds here and there. But it was just like, you know, it was basically, just sort of, pottering along.

Richard Minkley - 28:03

So, yeah. So. It's something that, drawing on there, you just said that you play games like, guess the crime, guess the hair-do. Seeing as these two bits are similar, I'll join them together. What kind of style of improv do you think you were doing?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 28:22

It was very much Whose Line Is It Anyway?

Richard Minkley - 28:25

Okay, what does that mean.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 28:26

So it was all the short form games that we'd seen other people do elsewhere. Or it was stuff that, because Geoff, I think I made the comment once, Geoff could find improv on uninhabited meteorite, his nose for it is phenomenal. It's like he would, he would go away to, say, Canada, and he would find three different improv theaters and go and see shows at them, or he do courses with them, and all that kind of stuff, which is, which was brilliant. And then he come back with new ideas. And we try those ideas out and we'd generally go "Yeah, that's alright" and just and just play whatever those games were. And it was also things from like, the book Impro by Keith [Johnstone], which I'm not going to talk about my opinion of it because I don't think that actually relates to the interview but...

Richard Minkley - 29:16

No, I think it does a little bit, because it has been described in those, both in those early days of Missimp and in improv at that time.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 29:26

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 29:26

Whose Line is it Anyway is basically short form game.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 29:29

Yes.

Richard Minkley - 29:30

And that British short form traditionally comes from Johnstonian improv. That's, genealogically, I believe that. You have the face of someone who is disagreeing with me. How am i wrong?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 29:43

It kind of does. A lot of the stuff that came from Whose Line Is It Anyway came through the Comedy Store Players, and specifically through Mike Myers, who played Austin Powers, because he was one of the original Comedy Store players. He was the guy who taught a lot of the games to the people who were in Whose Line is it Anyway. Including people like Josie Lawrence and Mike McShane and Greg Proops and all these kind of guys. Because Mike McShane, Greg Proops knew each other in California. But they both came over here to work. Mike Myers was doing comedy stuff over here. he was on, he was, this is showing my age now, he was on a thing, a slot called the Fast Asleep Club, which was on before the Wide Awake Club on TV AM. This is how old I am, in the 80s. And he was doing like that sort of silly comedy there, but was also doing more stuff with the Comedy Store players. And he got a lot of people involved in improv there. But again, his background, I guess, is more from the Johnstonian perspective, because he's Canadian. And Keith Johnstone's...

Richard Minkley - 29:46

Loose moose, is it loose moose theatre?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 30:44

Yeah. Yeah. Loose Moose in Calgary.

Richard Minkley - 30:47

So are you telling me that British improv is actually Canadian improv?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 30:50

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 30:50

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 30:51

Pretty much. Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 30:54

Shut everything down. Everything's ruined, no i'm joking. Okay, so what's your opinion on that then? Cuz you were saying like, "Well, I have an opinion on..."

Marilyn Ann Bird - 31:02

The Keith Johnstone, I think there's a phenomenal chapter in it on status. I think everyone should read that chapter on status in impro. The rest of the book, not for me.

Richard Minkley - 31:14

Yeah?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 31:14

yeah, pretty much

Richard Minkley - 31:16

Do you, Okay. There's two questions here. First one. What was your issue with the rest of the book? And I think - the second part of that question is, did you experience that problem in Missimp as well as in the book?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 31:29

My main issue with it is that a lot of his style with Keith Johnstone's book impro is that it's about him saying how amazing he is that he invented improv and he didn't invent improv. Improv has been going as long as the human race has existed, basically, but it has a sort of, it has a rather self congratulatory tone, which I don't think really fits with that. Geoff, I know loves the book, impro. Cool, fair enough. That's his taste. It's not, It's not my taste. I have read it from cover to cover, but it's just like that one chapter on status is, is what I would pick out from there and say, "yeah, everyone should read that". Not so much the rest of the book. But I don't think we ever had that conversation where, you know, everyone sat down went, "Oh, well, we'll all have to read impro and then we'll do, we'll do a reading circle about it, and we'll discuss our issues with it". It was never anything like that. It was literally Geoff went, "oh, I've got this book. Do you want to read it?" And I went, "yeah. All right". And I read it and I was just, and he's like, "oh, what did you think?", "I liked the chapter on the status." Pretty much.

Richard Minkley - 32:33

Fair enough.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 32:34

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 32:35

Okay. So we feel like we've got a chunk of Missimp history there. You've gone from Justin's house rehearsals, finding shows in pubs and bars and odd festivals. The Arts Theatre.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 32:49

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 32:50

Both sessions, you're... both periods of the history, you're in short form games, guessing games. Would you say that's a fair way to go about describing

Marilyn Ann Bird - 33:00

Some of them, it's a lot of stuff that we would use now more for, kind of, exercises rather than games, I think was the stuff that came through. And it was generally we were just rehashing stuff that we've seen in other places. Which is fine, and it works and some of those games, it doesn't matter, you

know, when you do them within yourself improv life or whatever. They're always going to be good value.

Richard Minkley - 33:23

But there's also a certain amount of... Okay, so sorry. Scratch that bit. So you're talking about doing short forms and stuff. And you've just, you've described how extra people started coming along.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 33:35

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 33:37

When you were in The Arts Theatre, was it rehearsals or drop-ins? Or was it more like some sort of protean combination of the two? What was it?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 33:47

It was more that, kind of, mix of things, where it's just like, people would turn up and we'd, you know, like, we'd play some games and that was it. And there wasn't any specific point to it. I don't think. We still have that, sort of like, little hard core of, I think Justin had gone by that point. So is, Geoff, I think Adey may have gone by that point as well. I don't know, it's one of those things where it's, where you start to think about the timeline, because I've never thought of it in that context before. Its just like, was this person here at that point or that point or that point? But I think at that point, it was Geoff and me and Nick and Clayton, and possibly Ross, as well. We're sort of hardcore of it. And then sort of random people that would come along from time to time or would come along for a few weeks and then disappear entirely or whatever.

Richard Minkley - 34:07

So it wasn't a rehearsal.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 34:43

No.

Richard Minkley - 34:43

And it wasn't a drop in.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 34:45

No.

Richard Minkley - 34:46

So was it just,

Marilyn Ann Bird - 34:48

It was just dicking about just really.

Richard Minkley - 34:49

It was just social really.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 34:50

Yeah, it was just like getting together and playing some silly games and having some fun, was the essential thrust of it

Richard Minkley - 34:57

And was there a conscious decision where you went from one to the other or did it just kind of?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 35:02

I don't know, you know, because it was certainly always remained that, I think while we're at the arts, at the, sorry, The Arts Theatre. I'm jumping ahead of myself because I was about so The Art Org, which is a different place entirely. But yeah, it didn't feel like there was that much structure to it, I don't think, when we we're at The Arts Theatre.

Richard Minkley - 35:24

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 35:24

It was when we moved on, and the group sort of started growing, because I think when you're that small a group, you don't necessarily need that much structure. Because you just go along and you play the stuff that you like, and you find the stuff that you find funny. And if, because it's just for that little tiny group. It's not like there any sort of like big learning points or anything that you need. It's just, you know, you going and doing stuff that's fun. Which is cool.

Richard Minkley - 35:52

Okay, so that, kind of, open social feeling, Arts Theater days. How long do you reckon that went on for? In fact, no, even better. Do you remember about what date, yeah, what date you moved in to The Arts Theatre?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 36:06

I haven't a clue.

Richard Minkley - 36:07

No.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 36:07

To be honest no. Again, when it comes okay if I...

Richard Minkley - 36:12

I mean, you don't need to but.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 36:14

If I have a rummage through my photo albums, I would probably find pictures from around that period that might have dates on. But it's not something that I can remember off the top of my head.

Richard Minkley - 36:24

Maybe. But let's, oh...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 36:27

Although, having said that, I remember having to wait for a guy called Andrew Regester to finish. It must have been after I've been to drama school. So I went to drama school in 2005-2006.

Richard Minkley - 36:38

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 36:38

And then after i'd finished drama school, there was a guy I knew from drama school called Andrew Regester. He used to help people prepare for their drama school auditions by taking them through songs and, and teaching them, you know, how to get the most out of a song and I remember having to wait outside the room for him to finish his session some weeks. So that would have been at least 2006

Richard Minkley - 37:02

Okay,

Marilyn Ann Bird - 37:03

There we go.

Richard Minkley - 37:06

This is not the first time that academic years have been formed when Missimp years happened. So did you spend a year out of Missimp?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 37:13

Yes. I went to Birmingham School of Acting for a year. It was like, first six weeks were great because that was when the improv module was. So I knew what I was doing and I had, had all these great comments like, "oh, you're absolutely fearless when it comes to improv". And then the rest of drama school was just hell.

Richard Minkley - 37:30

Really?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 37:31

Yeah, I hated being away from home. I really, really did. I was really homesick. I was struggling to cope with going back into education after so long being out of it. And I got that, got a real, kind of, bee in my bonnet about, you know, not being, being my own person, not being told what to do. And then you go back into an educational institution and you're, all that happens is you're constantly being told what to do. And that's fine, because that's education, but I was very much out of the habit of that by that point.

Richard Minkley - 37:57

So was it good to come back to Missimp, basically.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 38:00

Yeah, cuz it was just like, "ah, freedom".

Richard Minkley - 38:04

That is fascinating. So in fact, yeah, I will, because this reminds me of stories that I've heard as well. So what was it like being specifically a trained actress going back into that improv? Because there's

two things happening there. [...] There's one story there, which is an act, someone going from improv thinking, "This is good", becoming an actor. And there's also the story of an actor going back to improv.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 38:36

Yeah, the reason I went into, I went to drama school was not so much the improviser wanting to be an actor. It was that I'd come to a point where I was in a job that I absolutely despised. I was working in the civil service. I had a boss who was making my life really, really difficult and I had a nervous breakdown. And it was just like, at that point, I was just like, "No, I have to stop doing the things that 'society' wants me to do because it's making me really unhappy. And I was suicidal at this point. It's just like, no, I need to do the thing that I want to do. So I made, I basically made a deal with Nick that said, I will take a year, and I'll get everything together for drama school, and I'll do as many, like, acting projects and stuff as I can and then I will go to drama school. And then I didn't get into the drama school that I wanted, the first one, but I did get into Birmingham School of Acting. And I went to that and then I came back and Geoff when "Oh, have you learned any things that you can, you can teach us". So it's like, we got into all this ridiculous kind of like vocal and warm up exercises that I've learned that were you know, they were really, really good for acting and stuff. Probably a bit long winded for improv. Because if you're doing improv, odds are you're not, when it's you know, you're doing short form, whatever. You don't really need to know how to keep your voice going for two solid hours. and things like that, but it's like I came back with all these ideas and it was basically "Oh, now he will teach us all of these ideas" and like, "Okay, okay. Yeah." And me just being, like, piling on their warm up. So they're going from five minutes to 20 minutes. And which was not popular with certain people, which I can understand now looking back on it, but it's just like, at that point, it was just like, "Oh, no, I can do this. This is good. Let's do this." And that was that kind of abutted. Going from The Arts Theatre to The Art Org, I think was probably about the year after I graduated from drama school. So about 2006/2007.

Richard Minkley - 40:44

2006/2007 ish.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 40:46

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 40:46

So just to clarify, was it 2005/2006 you went to drama school.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 40:50

Yes, it was.

Richard Minkley - 40:51

So 2006 to 2007 was about the year that Missimp went from The Arts Theatre to The Arts Org.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 41:04

Yes.

Richard Minkley - 41:04

And is The Arts Org the name of the place that has become Hopkinson Gallery?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 41:10

Yes.

Richard Minkley - 41:11

What do you remember of that transition?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 41:14

I remember going from one drafty rooms going to another drafty room, essentially. Neither space that we had been using had really been set up for performance or anything. They were fine. The Art Org room didn't have a hole in the roof. That was, that was the main thing going for it at that time.

Richard Minkley - 41:35

Pretty good.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 41:35

Yeah. We got into that through a guy called Rob Howie Smith, who was trying to bring all these old buildings, that had been out of use back into use, which is how we ended up going from there to another space that he ran and all the rest of it. But its just like, yeah. We ended up in this sort of big, empty room and doing stuff in there.

Richard Minkley - 41:55

Who's Rob Howie Smith?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 41:56

Rob Howie Smith ran The Art Org. He's done stuff in Nottingham. He still does stuff in Nottingham. Have you been? You've been to the old Angel Pub, haven't you?

Richard Minkley - 42:06

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 42:07

You know, when you look out the window and you see that amazing picture of a wolf on the wall opposite.

Richard Minkley - 42:12

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 42:13

That's one of Rob's photos, that that is taken from.

Richard Minkley - 42:16

Oh Really?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 42:16

Yeah, he does all kinds of, sort of, creative stuff. But his big thing was bringing all these old spaces that had been disused back into use. And one of the ways of doing that was to, was for us to come along and run what were now turning into workshops in that space. And so we pay him like room rental of however much it was, and in return for that, we will get the space there.

Richard Minkley - 42:43

Okay, so, was it at The Arts Theatre or at The Arts Org that it became a workshop?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 42:53

I think there's probably more at The Art Org, just because the numbers that we had, were growing. Because at that point, there... We ended up with two different improv groups running.

Richard Minkley - 43:03

This is something I'm aware of.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:04

Yeah. So there was one that was run by Geoff, that we were involved in. There was one that was done by Geoff Simmons, who was otherwise known as Kiwi Geoff, because he was from New Zealand.

Richard Minkley - 43:16

Yes.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:16

And he is now, or was, I don't know if he still is, went back to New Zealand and became the deputy leader of a fringe New Zealand political party.

Richard Minkley - 43:28

Do you remember which party?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:29

I can't remember off the top of my head, but I remember someone mentioning his name and saying politics and I looked it up and it's just like, that seems like a weird party but I can understand why an improviser would be involved in it.

Richard Minkley - 43:41

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:42

But yeah, they didn't. They didn't do very well in the elections as far as I know.

Richard Minkley - 43:45

Okay. So. So it was Geoff Simmons was Kiwi Geoff?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:51

Yes. He was running, I think workshops on a Tuesday evening. And he got other people coming along to that. And that's where we got people like Charlotte Matheson, who's another kiwi. It's where... I'm trying to think who else came through there. It was just, but at some point, it was because he was living in Lincoln. Geoff Simmons was living in Lincoln at that point. So it was just like, it was a heck of a trek to go back and forth. So in, I think we did, we did a joint show where it was basically Kiwi Geoff's group versus mission improbable at the time, and you know, had lots of fun with that. And then people from that group started coming to Thursday nights. And people from the Thursday night, started going

to the Tuesday nights, and then it was all, just, it got a bit complicated and they just went, "shall we just all just go to the same thing. And that made it a lot simpler." And then Geoff was an academic, Geoff Simmons was an academic, and he was just like, he didn't really have time for this and the travel was a killer and he was talking about going back to New Zealand. So then we sort of absorbed his group, which is how Missimp started to grow that bit more.

Richard Minkley - 45:10

And that was at the time at The Arts Org.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 45:12

Yes.

Richard Minkley - 45:15

You know what, we've hit the 45 minute mark. I am going to sort of summarize the session we've been through, really.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 45:22

Which is just a tangled mess of...

Richard Minkley - 45:25

I'm aware, but it also feels like there is a, it's an interesting story. I'm trying to think of the best way to ask this question. But yeah. Like, yeah. How would you... Because at this... I'm going to try and think of a question before I just ramble on, which is very difficult. Because like you have described a story that leads up to a point where you're merging with, they were, was it the Nitwits?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 45:54

Yes, that was it.

Richard Minkley - 45:55

You're merging with the Nitwits in The Art Organisation. We'll talk about that later. But like how would you summarise that time between early 2000s in Justin's living room, or house or wherever, to going through pubs and stuff, going to The Arts Theatre, going to little gigs, I'm assuming, there was, I'm assuming that wasn't any big regular gigs.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 46:20

No, there was, there was no, there were no, apart from our one attempt at the residency at Junction Seven, there wasn't anything like that.

Richard Minkley - 46:26

How would you summarized that chunk of your improv life.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 46:29

Just meandering from one thing to the next. There was there wasn't any, sort of, specific purpose to it. I don't think, at that point. It wasn't like anyone to come and said, "Yes, this is what we need. This is," you know, "the route from point A to point B, and we're going to follow that". It was just it was just a series of. It was happenstance, essentially, that was, that was pushing where the group was growing. At that point, it was "Oh, so we can get a gig here. So you can go and do that. Have we got enough people? Yeah, we can go and do that gig. Oh, what about this gig? Oh, yeah, well, we can go and do

that gig. Still on for rehearsing on Saturday? Yeah. Okay, so all pile around to Justin's". And it wasn't like there was any sort of serious kind of methodology for where we were to where we were going.

Richard Minkley - 47:13

So that's, that does not... Sorry, I'm gonna rephrase this question before I say it in the wrong way. Why did you keep coming back to what you just described as a meandering happenstance?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 47:29

It was something to do. And it was fun. It was fun. That was the main thing was it was just like, yeah, we get together and it was silly. And we'd say stupid things and we do stupid things. And it was just fun and there wasn't any pressure. And it was just like, you know, occasionally you got to perform and that was amazing. And then you know, other times it was just you and like three or four of your mates in a room just being stupid and just saying silly stuff and doing silly stuff and making each other laugh. Certainly when Ross joined. He has the most amazing laugh. It sounds like a seal being club to death.

Richard Minkley - 48:09

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 48:10

It's a rough kind of, "huuuu huuuu huuu". it was just like, it's like, if that laugh doesn't keep you coming back to do improv, nothing will.

Richard Minkley - 48:20

My mum laughs like that sometimes. The sort of inward "huuu huuu huuu huuu". Right. I'm going to put a pause in the conversation for a moment. Okay, I'm going to Yes, we'll come back for another chat in a moment.

b) Part 2 of 2

3rd march 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, Glee club, improv, Nottingham, felt, jam, point, org, shows, stage, night, art, called, pun, big, Glee, comedy, question, Nick, grew

SPEAKERS

Marilyn Ann Bird, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley - 00:01

We are recording. There we go. So it is, again, Tuesday 3rd March 2020. It's half past three in the afternoon. We are Richard Minkley interviewing Marilyn, Marilyn Ann Bird. And this is the second part of our interview. Last we left off we just moved to The Arts Org.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 00:23

Yes.

Richard Minkley - 00:25

You've described it as a drafty room. What was The Art Org like?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 00:28

It was really, really ramshackle. It was Rob Howie Smith had basically got this empty building and gone. What can I do with it? So he kind of partially opened... he'd built some little office spaces. So he had people like, there was a composer working there at the time. Yeah, very, which seems, I see the look on your face and you go, "Yeah, not the sort of thing I'd expect someone to be renting space for" but there was a composer working there at the time. They had a little cafe downstairs, which was almost always close when we went in or if we went in it was just as they were closing up. I remember there being a sign on the toaster at one point that said, "Please don't put fish in the toaster". It was...

Richard Minkley - 00:36

What?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 00:46

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 00:54

That is a history all on its own.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 01:12

Yeah, that, so, it was just like it was very kind of cobbled together. And it was like, it was a lovely idea, but it's just like, it was, it was a, usually, a freezing room in there in the winter. And there used to be,

it's very odd. It was a room that was the front of the building. And to get into it, there's like a gate. Not a door, a gate. And I remember that very specifically because once I walked out and walked into the little, you know, they're the long peg thing that you get at gates that the latch goes on to. I walked into that and I was bruised across the top of my arm for several weeks. So I just went *slap sound* straight in to it.

Richard Minkley - 01:49

Wow, do you remember... I'm interested in how... In fact, yeah. I'm very interested in how things changed at The Art Organisation? Because it feels like an, In fact, I will ask, do you think that The Art Organisation, while Missimp was there, Missimp changed?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 02:12

Yeah, it got it got much bigger. There were...

Richard Minkley - 02:16

When did you first get a sense that that was happening?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 02:20

I think it was when we merged with the nitwits, to be honest, where it's just like, oh, there are more people than we thought that are interested in this. And I can't remember if we were advertising more widely, or something. I have no idea how it got that big. A lot of that I think will have been on the Organizational side with Geoff.

Richard Minkley - 02:40

Which Geoff?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 02:41

Oh, sorry, with Geoff monk.

Richard Minkley - 02:43

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 02:43

I have rather than than Geoff Simmons, although Geoff Simmons was also very into the, sort of like, getting people into improv and stuff. Because of course, he'd come over, because improv is a much bigger thing in New Zealand at that point.

Richard Minkley - 02:54

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 02:55

So it's just like he came over with all the, sort of, interest from that side, as well. So, and I think it was just when we merged those two groups, it started to sort of solidify a bit and get a bit bigger. And I don't know how it came about, but we ended up doing shows there on a monthly basis as well. And then, you know, we'd invite all of our friends to come and see the shows, and then friends would bring friends. And they'd be a poster up on the door, so people who didn't know would occasionally come along as well. And then people who come to see the shows would want to do the thing. So they would come and see a show and then they would come along to a jam, and you know, mess around and

play games and things and go, "oh, this amazing". And then the sort of team got bigger and bigger. Then we started doing more shows with different, sort of, people within that. And when we were organizing shows there, it was a much more, kind of, prolonged process where we'd get together at the, i think the Broadway on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, and we'd have a list of games. And we have to try and figure out who was going to play all of the games but all of the people that wanted to play the games were in the room. And so you'd have people basically saying, "Oh, well, I'd like to play this. And I'd like to play that" and then we figure out how many games people were in. And then we'd have to switch around to make sure that everyone wasn't just doing games in the first half and all this kind of stuff. But it's like at that point as well, when we were doing shows we had to build a stage. Every month, we had to build an actual stage to do it. And we ended up, because Geoff monk's brother and he was running mobile discos. He's now the country's best Simon Cowell look alike, as stated by Simon Cowell.

Richard Minkley - 04:39

I might have met this guy.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 04:40

Yes. He's made a brilliant living of looking like someone else. I think he might have just been in a film I've seen

Richard Minkley - 04:49

Really?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 04:49

yeah, playing a Simon Cowell look alike.

Richard Minkley - 04:52

That's an extraordinary thing.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 04:54

But he had, because he ran these mobile discos and stuff, he had access to things like curtains. So we ended up buying some secondhand stage curtains from him, but we had to hang those every single month. So you'd have Nick at the top for 12 foot ladder, hanging curtains at the back of this room, occasionally falling off the ladder. And you know, we'd have, the whole team has to be there an hour and a half early so we could build the stage and put the curtains up and warm up.

Richard Minkley - 05:22

When you build the stage was, like, I'm not imagining like hammers and nails, but is it like rostra.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 05:26

Yeah, so we had one lot which was these rostra that has like cross bars that slotted together and then you put panels on the top. And then sometimes, if those who disappeared, because they sort of lived in the basement but no one really knew who they belong to, we would have to build our own roster because they had these massive like have you seen baffle boards that you get at theaters?

Richard Minkley - 05:49

No. whats a baffle board?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 05:51

Right, a baffle board is basically it's two sheets of plywood with the rubberized on the outside metal edges, which are filled with a compressed material.

Richard Minkley - 06:00

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 06:00

And so you have to, like, get, like, three people on either end to lift them up and put them on top of these rostra or on top of whatever we were using as base you're on.

Richard Minkley - 06:10

So its something you perform on?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 06:11

Yeah. So instead of what they're actually designed for, which is blocking sound.

Richard Minkley - 06:16

Oh, I was gonna say because it sounds like some like a wall.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 06:20

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 06:20

Not a stage.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 06:21

Yeah. So its like, um, so we had to do things like with the rostra, if, we have to introduce a rule where you couldn't wear hard soled shoes in shows, because they made so much noise on this rostra, because it's basically sheets of wood on very short table legs, essentially. So it's just like, you're on there and hard shoes, like, "Bosh, Bosh, Bosh, Bosh, Bosh". And, they were, the staging was also dangerous. I mean, we had one show when Nick broke his toe on the edge of the stage. Where he was, he had taken his shoes off and was kneeling on them because he was playing a munchkin. And he broke his toe doing that. That was also the night that Ross managed punched himself in the face, Cat Clark had a spontaneous nosebleed and I got concussed where a chair got kicked into my face. And then I had to go the next day and sell cameras in boots.

Richard Minkley - 07:17

Was that...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 07:17

That was a single show.

Richard Minkley - 07:19

Was that a good example of what Missimp was like?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 07:22

It was, yeah, we were trying our hardest, but sometimes stuff just got on top of us. Literally got on top of us. That was also I think, when we first started sort of, we bought a video camera, and we started recording shows as well. So if you look on places like YouTube, you'll find stuff from our early shows. And it was... I mean, Nick's got whole archive of all the posters of all the shows that we've ever done, because he's designed most of the posters. But we started off with, you know, we'd like, we get an idea and do a post that was based on a theme and then do a show that's sort of vaguely based on that theme.

Richard Minkley - 07:59

What do you mean based on a theme? I've looked on the website, there are shows with things, like called, like, Improv TV and Improv something or another.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 08:00

So, we had things like, we'd do... We did a show that was at Halloween, so we did a Halloween themed poster but the show and the games weren't massively Halloween themed. Although we did do one show that was on Halloween one year where we're all in costume. And it sort of threw everyone for a loop because you just kept referring to the costumes a lot of time. So we had people like Martin Findel had done this amazing Cyborg outfit where he'd got this like rubber glowing eye thing that he had over his eye. But unfortunately, the stuff that he did he used to glued to his skin basically, he started forming this chemical fog inside. He's just like, "My eye really hurts", "cuts a hole in the side of the thing so that the fumes can escape". It was, it was weird stuff like that. And we felt like we have to have a solid gimmick for every single show that we did. Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 09:05

Is that about the period that we're talking?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 09:08

Yes. It's very much that. So there's things like improv elimination. And I really, I really, really didn't like competitive and elimination formats because, it's... I don't know if it was because the group of people we had were particularly competitive. But it's just like, it always felt like someone's nose was pushed out of joint by those because they felt like they hadn't done as well as they should have done because it was all based on, you know, audience response. So it's like, if, you know, if you didn't get as much applause at the end of a game as someone else did, then you got knocked out and all that kind of stuff. So it had the potential to create a bit of bad feeling, which made it, you know, sort of difficult. And also, when it got to as being quite a large group. It's like the decision about who was in the team for a show [...] can become something of a sore point because it can obviously start to feel like it's getting really, really cliquey if you're not one of those people that's casting the show, which I totally understand. And it makes it, you know, when you've got more and more people that want to perform, making sure everyone performs, but because you've got a paying audience, you have to make sure there's a certain standard. And I think there's a sort of, there's the opportunity for a kind of snobbery to kick in. And I think that, I think it probably did at some stage as well, where it's just like, you end up with people who go, "No I'm not going to come anymore, because I'm not casting show. So you know, what's the point?" Because then it become more about the, "oh, yeah, you come and you do this fun thing on a Thursday, but then there's a chance to be in a show as well". So it's just like that gives you more of a kind of focus.

Richard Minkley - 10:45

This is... This is one of the things I'm interested in, because you said it grew.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 10:53

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 10:54

So I want to take that idea of Missimp from growing and sort of put a pin in it for one moment while we returned to the idea, because we've talked a bit about the shows and building the shows. But you also use the word jam. Yeah. So you were having jams?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:07

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 11:07

Was it on a Thursday, did you say?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:08

Yeah, that's what they were always called.

Richard Minkley - 11:11

When you say they're always called, when did you start calling them jams?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:13

When we started doing stuff at The Arts Theatre.

Richard Minkley - 11:16

Arts Theater. ok.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:17

I think it was because Geoff came up with a poster, and it was a jar of jam and it just said, improv jam. And it said something like, "come along and do improv at this time on Thursday". And so it was just like, so it was a jam. That's what - we did. So, like a lot of improv, pun lead. Yes, very much. Well, not, mmm... Puns and improv. There's a big... You could you could have a fight about that kind of thing.

Richard Minkley - 11:43

Look, I've given you your thing on Keith Johnstone.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:45

Hey, we had to introduce the thing called pun shoe.

Richard Minkley - 11:49

Tell me about the pun shoe.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 11:51

Yeah, we had. We had someone who came along who still comes alongside, so, shall remain nameless, who's very, very fond of puns. The thing about ponds is that they tend to derail an improv scene because people go, "uuuggghhh". So we introduced the idea of pun show, which is when someone made a pun they'd got a shoe thrown at them. This ended when the person in question made a pun, I threw a trainer, they turned round it hit them squarely in the crotch. Yeah. Then the pun

shoe just became a metaphorical thing where someone make a pun and someone would shout, "shoe!"

Richard Minkley - 12:31

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 12:32

Vastly less dangerous than that.

Richard Minkley - 12:35

Yeah. Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 12:38

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 12:38

Okay, so the community has grown. Did you remember when... Because it felt like you said in The Arts Theatre, you kind of put up a thing saying, "we're doing improv. You can come along if you like", but you didn't really set up a jam. It was more just like you were saying, it's a social thing.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 13:01

It was there. It was more that we were there, we're doing this thing come along and do this thing with us. And no one showed any interest really.

Richard Minkley - 13:07

Because it feels like there was a difference between going from this social thing, which was improv, to it being commodified, (If to use a big word) as a jam.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 13:15

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 13:16

Do you remember when that happened?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 13:18

Not really. I'm going to assume... I'm assuming it is in sort of, we started picking up a few more people, when we were at The Arts Theatre, and then we shifted over to The Arts Org. I can't remember, I'm not entirely sure why we shifted to The Art Org. Geoff's probably a better frame of reference for that, because he was in charge of the sort of organizing and things, at that point. And then we shifted over to the Art Org and it's somewhere around that point that, where we just started getting more people coming along. And so generally, it would be Geoff would turn up with an idea that we can say, "Oh, we should do this". So we'd start doing, you know, x, y or z, based on this idea that he'd had. And then other people started sort of going, "Oh, well, I've got this idea", "Why don't why don't we do this idea?" And so we have things like that happening, but it was it... I don't know if there was a sort of concerted efforts to change it so much as it was just one of those things that developed because there were more people to deal with. And I think it's easier to deal with a larger group of people if you've got more structure, I think, because then you can just sort of drop people into whatever it is that you've decided that thing is.

Richard Minkley - 14:43

I'm noticing that a lot that, I mean, it might be because it's a long time ago, but also, there's a lot of 'it just kind of happened'.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 14:52

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 14:53

Is that your experience?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 14:54

Yeah, I mean, it was just a lot of so much of what happened with Missimp was organic. And it's just one of those things because people, different people turn up and they have different ideas. And they go, "well, could we do this thing?", and we go, "Yeah, all right. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, let's do that". It's like the first incidence of the long form show that happened while we were at The Art Org. It was a thing called custard... It was called either cast adrift or custard rift, depending on...

Richard Minkley - 14:57

What you thought of the show?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 15:27

Yeah. Well, the...

Richard Minkley - 15:28

Actually, I must be more clear. That makes it sound like, when that's going to be written down, It's going to look awful. Was it like Cast Adrift?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 15:36

Cast Adrift, but the place that it was set in was called custard rift. Or something like that.

Richard Minkley - 15:43

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 15:43

Yeah. So we had like, because we were going to do a show, and someone said, "Oh, yeah, well, I've been doing this sort of long form stuff". I can't even remember who was this guy called Steve Conlin actually, who's involved.

Richard Minkley - 15:58

I know Steve Conlin

Marilyn Ann Bird - 16:00

Yes. Big. Ginger.

Richard Minkley - 16:01

Yes.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 16:11

Yeah, he had this idea for doing like, an improvised sort of soap opera one month. And he went and, and he said to... And there was some other people who were interested in doing long formy stuff. And he said to me, "would you still come and see it if you went in it?" and i went "Yeah, of course", and watched it and it was a load, it was loads and loads of fun. And then it was just like, the sort of introductions to sort of long formy side of stuff. But on the other side of that, we had... The shows that we were doing at The Art Org were very, very popular. At one point we were the only comedy show available on a Friday night, in Nottingham.

Richard Minkley - 17:07

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 17:07

Yeah. So we were getting between 60 and 120 people coming along in this, just this space that was usually, sort of, full of other stuff as well. There was one night we did a show where, it's just like, we turned up and the whole place was full of art. And it's just like, "We're... We're doing a show", "Yeah, but the people came to set up the art stuff earlier because they got a show starting tomorrow". It's just like, "okay, we'll do an announcement" we had to start the show with, "Please don't touch the art there's like tied to all these metal pillars and stuff". It's just like, "just please don't touch it. There's a show going on. We're not allowed to move it. Just don't touch the art."

Richard Minkley - 17:47

I feel like there's built in they're an amazing critique of the arts industry in general. But let's leave that where it is.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 17:54

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 17:54

And... That's interesting. So do you think the... Which grew first, the jams and that part of the community, or the shows and the audience and that part of...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 18:05

The jams and that part of the community, I would say. Because we ended up, because they, we didn't... When we first started at The Art Org, I don't think we started and bam, there's a show. I think it was that we were there for several months. And everyone's going, well, "we're doing all this stuff. Shouldn't we like, put it do use?" And then Geoff had a word with Rob, who was running the venue and said, "can we possibly use some space to do a show?" and Rob went, "Yeah. Give us a split of the door and space is yours". And that's what we did.

Richard Minkley - 18:37

That's fascinating. So in that case, we'll split this into two. How do you think the jams grew?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 18:45

I haven't the foggiest to be perfectly honest.

Richard Minkley - 18:49

That's a great answer.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 18:50

I would love to say that we had like a distinct methodology where it's like "we are going to go", because a lot of this is sort of pre Facebook.

Richard Minkley - 18:57

Yes.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 18:58

Pre the sort of like social media. age so we didn't have...

Richard Minkley - 19:01

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 19:02

... all of those kind of things to sort of build on to it.

Richard Minkley - 19:06

Allow me to rephrase the question. What do you think it was about the jams that helped it grow?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 19:13

I think it was because they were fun. And they were silly. - Yeah? And it was just, we generally went for a drink afterwards as well. So, it had a sort of social aspect to it. So you could come along, meet people you wouldn't necessarily meet otherwise. We had people who, from like, all different backgrounds just come in to the jams. And it's just like people with, you know, had friends and they said, "Oh, I'm doing this thing and it's fun. Do you want to come along?" And, you know, it sort of grew from there as well. And just sort of, I think once we're in The Art Org as well, because it had that sort of artsy thing going on. I think we put up posters as well. I'm pretty sure we had posters at the bottom of the stairs that said, "Thursday nights, improv jam, 7:30 upstairs".

Richard Minkley - 20:03

So the venue had... Because it's interesting. You've just said that "Yeah, well, we put up a poster and people started coming up to it." But, you didn't have that response at The Arts Theatre?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 20:14

No, I think... But the thing is, if you go into The Arts Theatre, you go for a specific purpose, which is to go and do a play. And also, it's just, you're not necessarily going to be... Because the poster that we had was at the bottom of a flight of stairs, and most people, if they came into that building would just, you know, they open the door, they go straight up to the bar, or wherever it was the rehearsing and go and do their show, or go and do their, you know, audition or what have you. And, you know, their had that thing that they were there to do specifically, so it wasn't necessarily that, you know, they would go, "Oh, well, there's this other thing, that isn't the thing that I really, really want to do." And they just went, "meeeh", whereas The Art Org, it was very much, it was intended as an art space. So you had people who were doing creative things. So I don't know if it was the venue. So people go in with the intention of doing 'something' creative rather than a specific creative thing. Or you've got people who are creative coming in going, "Oh, that sounds interesting, but different to what I already do" and you know, just taking a punt on it.

Richard Minkley - 21:18

So people came had to punt on the jams. And that grew to a point where you wanted to put on a show.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 21:25

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 21:25

Do you remember your first show at The Arts Org?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 21:27

I can't remember what it's called. I remember.

Richard Minkley - 21:30

Were you in it?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 21:30

Yeah, I think it was. Was it the Knights of Jam-a-lot? Don't like puns within improv but puns on a poster work. I think it might have been called the Knights of Jam-a-lot because that was definitely when there was a social media.

Richard Minkley - 21:47

I'm pretty sure there's an event on the website for the Knights of Jam-a-lot.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 21:50

Jam-a-lot, yeah. And because one of David Ferland McCollough friend in...

Richard Minkley - 21:51

I'm sorry, what was that name?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 21:58

David Ferland McCollough

Richard Minkley - 22:00

Sorry, one more time.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:01

David Ferland McCollough. French Canadian.

Richard Minkley - 22:05

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:05

Lovely, lovely man. Did his PhD, was doing postdoctoral study here.

Richard Minkley - 22:09

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:11

Has now moved back to Quebec and broken Nick's heart because it's his, his platonic boyfriend.

Richard Minkley - 22:17

Oh.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:17

Yeah. You know it's a terrible sad story of a tragic romance for those two.

Richard Minkley - 22:24

I have to talk to Nick about that one. Yeah, bless him.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:27

Yeah. But one of his...

Richard Minkley - 22:29

I can't remember what the question was, now.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:30

Yeah, but one of his friends... You said, what was the first show?

Richard Minkley - 22:33

Yes, yes, what was the first show?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:34

I said one of his friends on Facebook in French said, "What an ugly poster" and Nick was quite offended.

Richard Minkley - 22:44

That's great.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 22:44

Because, I think there's a sort of it was a was about a step up from clipart the stuff that was on it, but it was just like, "this is what I have time for". And also its, you know, it's before Photoshop and all that kind of stuff became common.

Richard Minkley - 22:57

I feel like "this is what I have time for" is a very interesting concept in improv as well.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 23:02

yeah.

Richard Minkley - 23:02

Well, yeah, that's a different conversation for a different time. Picking up something we talked about earlier. How did having a show influence, because it feels we've reached a point where we have a community.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 23:20

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 23:21

As opposed to a bunch, or a group, like

Marilyn Ann Bird - 23:25

or a glob.

Richard Minkley - 23:26

Yeah, or a glob, yeah, it feels... there's group, glob, and then community, for some reason. How did having... So, I'm going to try and clarify my understanding here. So you had this glob that then grew into a community with people coming to the jams, which was a small community. There's kind of two things that are happening here. How did having a show affect both the community that already existed and how did it grow or shrink the... I'm assuming it grew?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 24:05

Yeah, more or less.

Richard Minkley - 24:06

Let me ask a pointed question. How did the existing community react to that gig?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 24:12

What the first gig or the...?

Richard Minkley - 24:15

Yeah, but also generally like having a regular gig.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 24:19

It gave people an opportunity to perform. So it made it, I wouldn't say it made it more professional, but it made it more, like there was, more focused, I guess. So it's just like, so there's a show on and you want to be in that show. So you say to Geoff, I want to be in that show. And then he, and then, you know, between us we go, "how many people we've got? We've got this many people. Can we put them in a show? How many games will they do?" all that kind of stuff. And like, sort of, fitting people into that metric. But of course, then it gets to the point where you have more people who want to be in a show than you can feasibly have in a show. We used to have up to... I'm trying to think how many it was. Because we just have curtains up and then we'd have chairs behind for people to sit on. And I think we have like sort of 10 to 12 people in a show maximum. Which seems like quite a lot

Richard Minkley - 25:12

That is a lot of people.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 25:13

Yeah, when you're doing short form, it doesn't seem like that many, because you can just drop people in and out. It's not like doing long form where it's like... You've got 12 people, you've got one person who comes on and says one thing and then gets killed.

Richard Minkley - 25:23

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 25:24

And they're, you know, like, huffy for the rest of the day, because that was their, that was the only part that they were in, and they had 12 friends in the audience. That kind of stuff, which, you know, we've all been through at some point.

Richard Minkley - 25:36

So it was a blessing and a curse.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 25:38

Yeah, because it's just like you want... Because the other thing is well, with it being a paid show, it wasn't just like, we flung open the doors and went, "Come in, come in", you know, "all you millions and millions of people who want to come sit down". It's just once people are paying for something, there's an expectation of a certain level of quality, I guess. And it starts off with you inviting all of your friends and your friends inviting their friends. And then you get sort of random people that you don't know. Like the guy who turned up to watch the show with a live parrot on his shoulder. Who tried to heckle Nick and Nick heckled him back and the parrot joined in and then they left. But

Richard Minkley - 26:16

Stop! Nick was heckled by a parrot!?!

Marilyn Ann Bird - 26:19

Nick was heckled by a man with a parrot. The parrot was very well behaved. The man beneath the parrot was not.

Richard Minkley - 26:26

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 26:27

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 26:29

Wow. Okay. So great. Now a parrot has completely ruined my train of thought. Um, so yeah, that's an interesting... So did it feel like... At what point do you remember feeling it was more of a community than it was a glob or a group?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 26:48

Um, I don't know, to be honest. Because it's one again, it's one of those weird things where it's like... Because I think about that time, after i've come back from drama school. Its very, very confusing to try and figure out what the timeline of this is. I don't think there's any specific point where I went, "Now there is a community. Now we have a responsibility to other people", or anything like that. It still just seemed like a big sort of group of people who got on really well.

Richard Minkley - 27:17

Is it a little bit like looking back, you realize it was a community, but you didn't call it that at the time?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 27:22

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 27:22

That's interesting.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 27:23

Because, it was still at that point where it's just like, you know, someone would have a party and everyone from improv would come to it. Whereas now it's like, if you tried to invite everyone to party from improv, you wouldn't fit them in your house.

Richard Minkley - 27:33

And you have tried.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 27:34

I've tried. I have tried. 35 people is the maximum this tiny little place can fit.

Richard Minkley - 27:40

Okay, so, Hmm. How long, okay, so... how long did that Arts Org period go, do you remember?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 27:55

I don't know. I know...

Richard Minkley - 27:56

Or at least when did things start changing at The Art Org.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 27:58

I know that the Art ,Yeah, well, I know that Art Org changed hands essentially. Because the person that took over running it's guy called Liam Woodgate, who runs Hopkinson Gallery now, and has made into this amazing sort of space for, you know, like, "you need something vintage. That's where you go".

Richard Minkley - 28:15

Lots there.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 28:15

Yeah, it's, and there's loads and loads of stuff on and he, he kind of took over the management from Rob. It was also at that point that, lets have a think, Mark Tughan from The Glee, who owns the entire Glee Club chain, turned up to one of the shows.

Richard Minkley - 28:39

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 28:39

He'd heard about this thing. It was the only improv, it was the only comedy that was on on a Friday night. Mark Tughan from The Glee Club turns up. It's when Helen said, who runs the Nottingham Comedy Festival ,was involved in Missimp.

Richard Minkley - 28:55

Oh, was she performing with Missimp?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 28:56

Yes.

Richard Minkley - 28:57

Well, not, well, in that,

Marilyn Ann Bird - 28:58

yes she was

Richard Minkley - 28:59

in the jam and the show.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 28:59

Yeah, she was, Yeah, she was in the shows. She used to, a lot of the time, because she was quite shy, she would record it for us. So she set up the video camera and she would sit and record it for us, which is amazing.

Richard Minkley - 29:12

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 29:12

And she was also, she was in a couple of shows, if you look up Missimp on YouTube and look up the littlest loo attendant, you'll see Helen Stead performing at The Glee Club.

Richard Minkley - 29:21

Okay

Marilyn Ann Bird - 29:22

Doing a phenomenal job. And...

Richard Minkley - 29:27

So you were just saying that the the guy who owns The Glee Club chain.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 29:32

Yes.

Richard Minkley - 29:32

Turned up at your gig.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 29:33

Yeah, Mark Tughan. He went to university in Nottingham. He's wanted to have a Glee Club in Nottingham for a long time but couldn't find a space for it. And then the Jongleurs chain basically, I can't remember if it went bankrupt or they just started closing clubs because they were losing money. But they basically closed their venue in Nottingham and he was looking at that space to turn into Glee Club Nottingham. And on the back of coming and seeing the show and being in a room with 90 other people, and seeing how much they're enjoying it, he offered us a slot at the soft opening of the Nottingham Glee Club. Which we did to an absolutely packed room. And it was, I think there are four

or five of us, and we were supposed to be a five minute slot and I think we ended up doing about 25. And just having a whale of a time with it. And off the back of that, that's when we then got the residency at The Glee Club. I think the link to getting The Glee Club was actually Helen Stead, because at that point, she was getting more involved in, sort of, promotion of comedy. She decided that was her, that was going to be her thing. It may have, I can't remember if she was if she'd invited him or if he just came along. And then he and Helen got involved in a conversation which ended up with us being offered the slot. I know she was, she was kind of instrumental in that but I can't remember exactly how.

Richard Minkley - 31:00

She was in there, somewhere.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 31:01

yes.

Richard Minkley - 31:04

How did, so. that's a big change.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 31:07

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 31:07

So let's, let's just double check. How was it performing a packed night at the opening night of The Glee Club in Nottingham?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 31:13

Fucking terrifying.

Richard Minkley - 31:14

Terrifying?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 31:15

I mean, amazing, but it's just like, you know, there were... We were basically on a stage that was the size of a dining room table.

Richard Minkley - 31:23

Ok.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 31:24

And yeah, because if you think of The Glee Club, you think of stand up comedians, and they had, you know, they had this amazing rundown of comedians who are doing like, you know, 5-10 minute slots, and we were kind of bundled in there with them. And so it's just like, you know, it was us, sort of squeezed into this tiny little bit of a stage doing our thing and getting an amazing response from all these people who were already very well oiled because it was either free or very low price drinks, plus they were getting free food and all the rest of it. So they're all well up for, you know, literally anything could have been on that stage and it would have been amazing because they were sat down having this fantastic time where they've got free night out. But it's just like being in front of that audience, it's like, little bit terrifying for us because it's a professional comedy club. I mean, how many improv groups

do you know of that run at professional comedy clubs at that point. And also absolutely phenomenal because we slayed them.

Richard Minkley - 32:20

Yeah?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 32:20

We absolutely killed that audience. And it was amazing. And off the back of that we got the residency at Glee and, you know, it all sort of sort of snowballed in that direction, which was amazing. But at the same time, we're still doing all the jams and stuff at The Art Org.

Richard Minkley - 32:35

So the jams and the shows are still going on and then you do a show at Glee Club.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 32:41

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 32:44

Because there are two events here that come next, or at least I understand they're coming next. The Glee Club residency where you do regular shows there and no longer using The Art Org because you described how changed hands became the Hopkinson Gallery, at some point.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 33:01

Yeah, so there was no there wasn't really any space for us there. So then we went what happened

Richard Minkley - 33:04

What happened first the residency or the...?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 33:08

I want to say it's the... I'm trying to think.

Richard Minkley - 33:12

Or the closing of The Art Org.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 33:14

I'm not sure if it was, I think it was the res... I want to say it was the residency.

Richard Minkley - 33:18

Was there a period where you had one foot in one foot and the other [...]

Marilyn Ann Bird - 33:22

I can't remember off the top of my head.

Richard Minkley - 33:24

Ok.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 33:24

I think if there was it wasn't much of an overlap, because of course with, the thing is The Art Org changed, but we were still doing stuff there. I'm trying to think because, ugh, such a long time ago and I'm terrible with dates.

Richard Minkley - 33:43

In that case, let me change the question a little bit. Did you leave The Art Organisation because there was no longer a space or because you were no longer allowed to use it?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 33:54

I think it was because there was no longer a space because it was being changed into sort of, it was more of a kind of art space rather than, you know, like art and performance and everything. And it was becoming more kind of solidified as a place to go for a specific thing.

Richard Minkley - 34:11

Do you remember where... Sorry, I interrupted you next?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 34:13

No its okay.

Richard Minkley - 34:14

Do you know where you went to rehearse after that?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 34:17

Stoney Street. We were in a random office building. And in a space that was run by some guys who are trying to put together a, this will sound familiar to you, a community television station called Zoo TV. And those guys, I think has seen as doing stuff and it offered a space. And they're also interested in us trying to do a sort of improv, kind of, show for them and the stuff that we did for them was terrible and it just didn't work on TV and it just it just felt really, really bad but they gave us this free space to work in every Thursday night. I remember it mainly being absolutely boiling in because there was no air conditioning in there. And having to like lever the windows open, having people like leaning out wafting themselves trying to cool down. And I can't remember how long we were there for, but we were doing sort of random rehearsals there. That was also when we started getting back into doing some more kind of musical stuff. Okay, and it's just, yeah.

Richard Minkley - 35:25

So was it, you were rehearsing in stony Street and performing monthly at The Glee Club?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 35:30

Monthly yeah. Although, when we first started doing the stuff at The Glee Club, we had, we were being shifted from night to night because they weren't sure. You know, I think their initial idea was that they're going to have comedy on seven nights a week.

Richard Minkley - 35:45

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 35:46

And then they discovered that there wasn't the market for that. So they were cutting down the days that they were open. We got shifted from... We used to do stuff in the smaller room, then we're in the bigger room, then we're in a smaller room, then we're in the bigger room again.

Richard Minkley - 35:59

Like different days of the week.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 36:00

Yeah. And in the end, we ended up doing stuff on a Friday evening, I think, at The Glee Club. And we were doing that sort of month after month after month. And towards the end of the residency, the audience numbers are going down and down, down, down, down. We were we were no longer the only show in town when it came to comedy on a Friday night. And I think we've got a bit set in our ways about the sort of stuff that we were doing there as well.

Richard Minkley - 36:31

I'm, I'm very interested in the decline of The Glee Club.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 36:34

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 36:36

But if I may, to clarify did the, again, to go back to the, the show and the jams. You were still running jams in stoney street?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 36:46

Yes.

Richard Minkley - 36:47

How was the move from The Art Org to Stoney Street? How did that affect the jam?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 36:55

I'm trying to think It didn't really have an effect on numbers, it didn't really have an effect on the people who were coming. We still had a lot of, sort of, we had about 15 to 20 people who'd come on kind of rotation. There were people that we knew from doing stuff at The Art Org who would come and do stuff at Stoney Street as well. There was, we had... Oh, it was around that time, I think, that they started doing in improv at the uni. So, we would occasionally get uni students who were doing improv at the university coming along as well.

Richard Minkley - 37:38

That's interesting. So what do you remember what, about what year we're in now?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 37:43

It would be, hang on.

Richard Minkley - 37:45

Because I remember 2006 to 2007 was the year that you move to...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 37:49

No, 2005 to 2006 was when I was in Birmingham.

Richard Minkley - 37:52

And then 2006 to 2007 was when people move to The Art Org.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 37:56

Yes.

Richard Minkley - 37:58

Do you remember how long you in The Art Org?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 37:59

I think it was about... I'm trying to think what shows we did while we're there because we did some big ish...

Richard Minkley - 38:09

Well, if you can't remember I think i can find records.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 38:11

We did, yeah, we did a fundraising. We did a 24 hour improv jam at The Art Org, and that was to raise money to take play up to Edinburgh. And I think it was 2011.

Richard Minkley - 38:28

In 2011, you took a show up to Edinburgh?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 38:31

Yeah. Lloydie had written a show called HR days night, again with a puns, that we were taking up to Edinburgh and we had to raise the money to do that. So it is a 24 hour improv marathon which ended up taking 38 by the end of which I was virtually delirious.

Richard Minkley - 38:52

So you did a 38 hour 24 hour improv jam?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 38:56

Well, it took 38 hours because we had to build the stage and everything before forehand. I remember the last show, because we've been having, sort of, we'd been having breaks to cross over to the next show because everything was a maximum hour slot. And it was about quarter to... It was about a quarter to whatever the time was on that Sunday afternoon. And someone said, "Oh, we've only got this much time left", and I went, "If it was any of the other shows we would have been finished by now."

Richard Minkley - 39:29

Wow.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 39:30

Yeah, that was that was when we had quite a large group of people, but we had, Yeah, that was...

Richard Minkley - 39:37

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 39:38

That was something I would never attempt again.

Richard Minkley - 39:40

And that was at the Stoney Street period or was that at The Art Org.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 39:43

No, that was at The Art Org period. So that was I think that was in 2011.

Richard Minkley - 39:48

Okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 39:49

Possibly 2012.

Richard Minkley - 39:52

Thats... This is a delicate question. And this is the kind of question where I'm happy to take the recording and show it to you afterwards so you can be happy with the answer. What went wrong with The Glee Club?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 40:13

What went wrong with The Glee Club was that...

Richard Minkley - 40:15

Or even did something go wrong with it?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 40:17

Well, the thing was when Mark Tughan had been coming to see us we'd been getting, like I said, you know, 60-90 people in this space, coming to see us. But we were literally the only comedy show in town. At that point Just the Tonic weren't running anything, Jongleurs had ceased to exist in Nottingham. We were literally, if you wanted to see comedy on a Friday night, we were the only thing there. There wasn't anyone running any like satellite nights have X, Y and Z. You had Spiky Mike would have been running his stand up nights at The Maze, which I think were on Wednesday. But there wasn't, there just wasn't anything there. So we...

Richard Minkley - 40:53

Not a Friday.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 40:53

Yes. So we will pulling in these great numbers. And then, within quite a short period, Mark Tughan open Glee Club in Nottingham, Jongleurs came back to Nottingham, and, Just the Tonic, run by Darrell Martin, started again. So all of a sudden, we weren't the only comedy in town. And we went from being in a small room at Glee, which fitted about, I think, 60 people at the very most. And that was if you had the room, like really packed out of chairs, to doing the main room. Because a lot of the stand up comedians would rather play a small room that's packed to the rafters than a big room that's empty. And we had...

Richard Minkley - 41:34

Wait, so you got the big room because they didn't want the small... because they wanted a small room.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 41:38

Pretty much. Yeah. Which is an interesting thing to do.

Richard Minkley - 41:43

Thats fascinating, okay.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 41:44

Yeah. So we had like, so we had this big room. And some times we're doing really, really well. I think what probably happened was, people would come along and they'd enjoy it and then they come back the next month and we'd be doing something that was very similar. And I think people just sort of lost their appetite, the audience just lost their appetite for it. Because it was more expensive than The Art Org to go there. The drinks. When we were The Art Org you could bring your own drinks, because they didn't have a license to sell, but they had a license so that you could drink your own alcohol within that space. Whereas you went to The Glee Club, and it was like five, six pounds a pint, because it's a comedy club. You know, and it's just, you know, it's three different things on tap. And, you know, God knows how much it costs, the spirits and all that kind of stuff. So it's a much more expensive night out compared to, you know, what we've been charging for The Art Org. So it goes from, you know, it being a night out with you taking, you know, your bottle of, your carrier bag full of bottles of, you know, Bud, or whatever your particular drink was. Because we always, at the end of The Art Org shows you always used to say, "if you've brought bottles, can you either put them in the recycling bin or just take them away with you"

Richard Minkley - 42:02

I bet you no one listened to that.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:01

Yeah. You'd be surprised.

Richard Minkley - 43:03

Really?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:03

We used to have audience members who'd helped us stack the chairs at the end.

Richard Minkley - 43:07

This is, this is unusual for me. You say bring your own alcohol and I imagine, basically, piss heads, rocking up, getting smashed and ruining things.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:16

No.

Richard Minkley - 43:16

They sound very well behaved.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:18

Yeah, they were. They were remarkably well behaved. We did occasionally have people that were absolutely wasted who we had to ask to leave. But it wasn't like a regular occurrence. It wasn't like they were fistfights and people being glassed or anything like that. It was more, because it was just like a friendly atmosphere. So people who knew someone in the, in the cast would come and bring their friends and say, "Oh, we can bring your own beer, your own booze". So you know, like, they turn up with those funny little half bottles of wine.

Richard Minkley - 43:44

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:44

Or what have you, you know. They get plastic glasses from the bar and stuff and they'd be fine with that.

Richard Minkley - 43:49

Ok.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 43:49

And then we get to The Glee Club, and it's a much more expensive proposition. At this point, as well, you have to bear in mind that people like my wave of Missimp, which is kind of second wave Missimp. We've got first wave, which is Geoff and the guys who started all this with Andy Barrett and everything. I came in as kind of second wave with Clayton and Ross. You've got third wave, which is like Nick and all of these guys and everything. But the thing is, it's like the general age of the members of Missimp had increased. So a lot of the friends that would come along to stuff at Art Org, had started having families. And if you have families, and you have small children, you're way less likely to leave them on a Friday night to go out and, you know, drink a load of bottles of beer and watch your mates messing around on stage. So, the sort of general age bracket of people associated with Missimp had increased. And so, the ones that are younger can't necessarily afford The Glee Club prices and the ones that are older, have got kids to look after and you know, like jobs tiring them out by the end of the weekend. So they're not necessarily going to come. And I think we've kind of got stale with what we were presenting at Glee as well. So we started introducing more, kind of, long formish stuff and scene work kind of things and all that kind of stuff. But it wasn't a big enough change. And it wasn't as, sort of, different...

Richard Minkley - 45:15

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 45:16

As people wanted it to be month on month on month.

Richard Minkley - 45:19

How, ugh. Honestly, I'm absolutely fascinated by this. What...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 45:26

But there was also, there was also the thing about advertising where we would, you know, get all these flyers done, and we'd, you know, like, leave loads of flyers at The Glee Club for them to hand

out after shows and all that kind of stuff. But we weren't... They weren't necessarily reciprocating in terms of the publicity. So they had their own Twitter feed and things like that, and they would very rarely mentioned us on the Twitter feed. Or, you know, they'd cut off, you couldn't buy, I think it was, people were never sure if you could buy tickets on the door or not. So they book on the website, their ticket, or you know, and then they'd stop selling tickets two, three or maybe four hours before the show, so people couldn't buy tickets on the website. So they assumed it was sold out. So they couldn't get tickets to come and see us.

Richard Minkley - 46:13

Right.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 46:14

And all that kind of stuff. It was, it was the kind of... It was a combination of things, I think, at that point.

Richard Minkley - 46:23

I'm aware that we're running out of time. So I'm kind of balancing off what questions to ask. How do you think The Glee Club affected the community side of it? It may not have felt like a community or been called a community, but, how did that affect it?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 46:41

I think it made it quite cliquey, to be honest. I think there were people who were in the team for the show or whatever, and then there was everyone else. And I can imagine that that didn't go down particularly well with people if they were... That's the other thing as well. There wasn't that much variation in the team that was on stage, but we felt it, I think it felt like there was more pressure for us to be more professional to have, you know, people that we thought was the best to represent us and all that kind of stuff. And I think it kind of... I think that impacted on the way it was perceived by people within the community as well. Because it's just like, "well, there's no point me, there's no point me going along, because you know, I'm not I'm not gonna be in it. So, you know, why bother?"

Richard Minkley - 47:24

And would people say, "what's the point in going to the jams if I'm not going to be in the show?" Or was that, or was it people going, "I might as well not go to the show, because I've seen these people. I'm not necessarily interested going in it", or is that another reason?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 47:38

Yeah, I don't. I don't know. It's very difficult having, because, in this case, I'm very much on the inside looking out because I did most of The Glee shows, which of course, makes me part of the clique.

Richard Minkley - 47:48

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 47:50

Which makes it very difficult to judge what other people were feeling about it. But it did, I don't know. I think it was just that it felt like it was. It was becoming too samey. We had some, we had some great nights there. We used to, I remember complaining about the music in the bar afterwards which turned out to be a pre-fame Jake Bugg. Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 48:09

What, on the, like, performing or on the record.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 48:11

He was, no, he was in the bar downstairs as like the after show entertainment and I remember hearing him one night and it was really, it was just, it was, the music was much louder than it probably needed to be and I just leant over to someone and went, "well, sounds like someone listened to a lot of Oasis when he was growing up."

Richard Minkley - 48:28

Very Well.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 48:32

This will be cut out for the libel reasons, wont it.

Richard Minkley - 48:35

No, no, this is going in. This is going to be a clip on social media.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 48:38

Oh, jesus.

Richard Minkley - 48:38

yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 48:39

I just got swear lots now, so you've got to cut it all.

Richard Minkley - 48:42

No, fuck it, you're dealing with it now. Okay. I'm going to try and fit two more questions in before we round it up.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 48:49

Ok.

Richard Minkley - 48:49

One of them is a basic question, but there's a very particular thing. Both in improv generally, I've seen it a lot and there's something very specifically with Missimp which is, you know, part of this is going to be about research and one of the things that's gonna be looking at this is gender.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 49:04

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 49:05

And there's a story here where we're talking about what Missimp has been through.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 49:09

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 49:10

But in the same way, we talked about you as an actress. You're a woman, I don't want to break it...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 49:15

I am.

Richard Minkley - 49:15

I don't want to break it, too.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 49:17

I know. I'm a very blokey woman, though.

Richard Minkley - 49:19

Really?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 49:20

Yeah, I kind of am. I've never been one of those girly girls. I had horrific time at secondary school, where I was bullied by about 85% of the girls in my year. And it's like, I've never, and also I've, because of the, sort of, my home situation, I never had that kind of girly going shopping with your mum and buying clothes and all that kind of stuff. So it was like, that was kind of, put very much to one side for me. So it's just like, I don't think I felt that my gender should be a barrier to me doing anything, because I've never considered myself to be particularly girly.

Richard Minkley - 49:59

I feel like I am horrifically summarizing the time, but like, do you have a particular memory where your gender played a role in Missimp? Because I'm aware that you were...

Marilyn Ann Bird - 50:16

I, I was

Richard Minkley - 50:17

You we're probably, very often, the only woman in the group.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 50:19

I was the only woman in Missimp for about five or six years.

Richard Minkley - 50:26

What was that, what was that like?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 50:28

It was fine. I mean, it's not like there was masses of sexual tension between me and all the other blokes in the, in the group at all.

Richard Minkley - 50:35

Yeah.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 50:36

It was just like, you know, we were getting together. We were doing a thing that we thought was fun. And it didn't feel like my gender was really an issue. It wasn't like, you know, I was being objectified or

anything like that. It was just I... This is like a part of a much, much bigger question, but I think there is, in western society specifically, and in general, I think there's this idea that girls can't be funny, that women can't be funny. And there's, it's an interesting thing. The the example I always use is, when you see people with their kids who say 5, 6, 7 years old, you ask the parents, "what's your favorite thing about your son?", "Oh, he's so cheeky?" You asked the same question about their daughter, if she was displaying the same behavior as her male counterpart, she would be categorized as rude and disrespectful, and, you know, horrible and a little madam and all of these kind of things. Because what is valued in girls, that we're bringing up in this kind of society, is that they are nice, and that they defer to people and that they, you know, listen to what other people want, and do what those other people want, and we're raised to be more kind of people pleasers. What they don't take into account is that there are people like me who are incredibly stubborn and who will do what they want and who will not change for other people because why should I because this is who I am. And I think that kind of bullheadedness is, works very well when you get into comedy and stuff, because there is still very much a gender bias to it. It's like, if you look at any comedy club, and you look at the lists of people that they have had on stage, you know, for every...

Richard Minkley - 52:30

A lot of white men.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 52:32

Yeah, but it's like for every Jo Brand, there are, you know, 15, 16 blokes on the bill, you know, for, for any... I think it's, it's a weird kind of bias within comedy itself. And I think it can seem incredibly intimidating. And I think that's one of the reasons that it took so long to get more women involved. I mean, I was so happy when we've got people like Ellen when we were at the article coming along and doing stuff with us.

Richard Minkley - 53:00

Did you say Ellen or Helen?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 53:01

Ellen. Ellen Spaeth, who had moved to Edinburgh left us all alone.

Richard Minkley - 53:07

What is it with Edinburgh?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 53:08

I don't know. It's like it's a mecca. It's like, you know, you, I know what the attraction is now, with Brexit breathing down our necks but you know. But then we got Charlotte, who came over from the Nitwits and Katherine Clark, who came in from the Nitwits and everything. It was like, and all of a sudden it was just like, "there are more women". And now, it's a lot of time when you go to drop ins, when you go to shows, it's, there's a 50/50 gender split. I was so pleased, a few months ago, because for the first time ever on a course, we had more women than men.

Richard Minkley - 53:40

Well.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 53:41

And I think it's, I think it is slowly changing. But I think there's still a long road to this.

Richard Minkley - 53:47

There is... I shouldn't have asked this question. I should have saved this because, I think, I might need to organize another interview because we haven't even touched post Glee yet.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 53:54

Yeah.

Richard Minkley - 53:55

And that's where most of the like changes recently has happened.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 54:00

Oh, yeah. Ughl, so, even changes before Glee as well that we've not got into.

Richard Minkley - 54:04

Oh, don't. I'm gonna have to buy another SD card.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 54:07

Oh.

Richard Minkley - 54:08

So, let's say then from going to that pub, talking to Geoff about getting involved, that is big story going through Justin's house, Arts Theater, Arts Org, Glee Club. Why did you keep coming back to it? Not because, not that, because I know we talked at the beginning, why you got involved. Once you were involved, why did you keep coming back to Missimp?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 54:41

It was funny. It was fun. I liked the people that were involved. And it was something to do. To be honest, that, that, that downplays it so, so much, but it's like I went through a series of several jobs, like, working in a call center where I had people who were just phenomenally mean to me on the phone and made me cry. I worked at the University of Nottingham for several years, which was fine, but it was like temp work and it's a lot of... You just have all this other stuff when, when you leave university, when you leave education at any point, it's just like, all of a sudden you just, like, have all of this responsibility dropped onto you. And then you need a break from that somehow, somewhere. For some people, it's like, you know, going out clubbing every Saturday night or you know, like, going to the darts or watching football, you know, whatever it is, is playing five aside on a Sunday afternoon with your mates in the league, because that's what you do. And you just need a break from that sort of monotony of your day to day life. And I think improv is absolutely brilliant for that. And Missimp, for me, was that sort of break from the norm and it was just a chance to basically go, "NAAAAAAAAAA" about everything else that was going on in my life and just go, "No, this is for me. This is silly. This is fun. I get a laugh. I get people laughing At the stuff that I do, so I must be doing all right". And, you know, it just felt like it was something that was the antidote to everything else that was going on in my life at that point.

Richard Minkley - 56:14

Wow. Is there anything else you would like to say before we wrap up this interview? I'm gonna try and I don't know whether you'll be available, but I'm gonna try and get another one of these in. Is there anything you'd like to add to the end of this one?

Marilyn Ann Bird - 56:25

Um,

Richard Minkley - 56:26

yeah, and no, is an acceptable answer, by the way.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 56:29

I don't I mean about this period in Missimp's history specifically.

Richard Minkley - 56:35

Anything. To be honest, it's mainly just if you've got anything you want to add to what we talked about so far. Doesn't have to be anything if you don't want.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 56:47

I think it's interesting to think about the number of people, and the different types of people, that have come through, even just in that short, shortish, well, it's not that shortish period. That, say, 10 year period. How many people came through the doors of Missimp and seeing how it affected them, and how it changed them and that was amazing. But it's just like, I do wonder what happened to so many of those people that were associated with it in various different capacities. It'd be fascinating. See what they've gone on to do that has in any way been influenced by what they did with us?

Richard Minkley - 57:26

Well, you can just go to Edinburgh and find out. Apparently they're all there.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 57:28

Yeah, yeah yeah.

Richard Minkley - 57:32

Right. I'm going to call that there. Thank you for your time.

Marilyn Ann Bird - 57:34

No worries.

Richard Minkley - 57:35

We're gonna stop that.

4. Nick Tyler

4.1. Interview 1 of 2

a) Part 1 of 2

9th march 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, improv, play, jams, games, Marilyn, Geoff, Ross, Nottingham, bit, point, pub, remember, fucking, perform, Arts Theatre, fun, running, nice, theater

SPEAKERS

Nick Tyler, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

what I? Alright then.

Nick Tyler 00:01

Do what you want man. Its my house.

Richard Minkley 00:03

Well, I'm happy to say that I am here. It's 7:52pm. On Monday, 9th March.

Nick Tyler 00:11

Sounds like a crime scene.

Richard Minkley 00:12

Yeah. I'm here interviewing Nick Tyler. I'm Richard Minkley. And this is for the Missimp oral history project. Hello, how. I feel i start all my interviews with "Hey, how are you"

Nick Tyler 00:25

I'm alright, thanks. How are you?

Richard Minkley 00:27

I'm very well. Thank you.

Nick Tyler 00:28

I felt like we've had this conversation off microphone already. But thats all right.

Richard Minkley 00:32

Yeah. Let go in...

Nick Tyler 00:32

In the interests of history.

Richard Minkley 00:33

... The main question. Or the big question, which is, what is your first memory of Missimp

Nick Tyler 00:43

That was turning up to the first rehearsal that Marilyn went to. When they were meeting somewhere up on Alfredsson road. Some old studio space out there might have been music studio. I can't remember what, what the hell it was. Geoff might. Because Marilyn had seen some advert somewhere for local improvised comedy group, mission improbable, looking for people to join them and I believe she dragged on mate Ross from university over, as well. And at the time I was not really up for doing it but I was content to go along and observe. And took notes, which are probably got somewhere. Of what they could do better.

Richard Minkley 01:26

Does that say a lot about what you thought of them, when you saw them.

Nick Tyler 01:29

No, no, no, no. they're doing fun stuff because, who would that have been? That would have been Geoff and Justin, and Ade. Who else could there have been? Maybe it was just those. Maybe it was just those three.

Richard Minkley 01:45

You said your friend Ross came. Do you remember Ross' surname?

Nick Tyler 01:47

Yeah, remember Ross' surname. I've known him for 22 years. Ross, Ross Parrish.

Richard Minkley 01:52

Ah, yeah, ok.

Nick Tyler 01:53

Double R. Rrrrrrr.

Richard Minkley 01:56

Okay, sorry. I thought you meant double R in Ross, but it's Parrish.

Nick Tyler 01:59

That would be great if that was in the

Richard Minkley 02:01

RrrrrRoss

Nick Tyler 02:01

RrrrrRoss. I can't remember what his middle name is. It might be an R R Parrish.

Richard Minkley 02:05

Okay. Yeah. So. That's quite interesting because.

Nick Tyler 02:10

Did Marilyn remember something completely different.

Richard Minkley 02:11

No, it's you your first memory was someone else's improv experience.

Nick Tyler 02:16

Oh yeah.

Richard Minkley 02:17

You weren't improvising at that point.

Nick Tyler 02:18

No i was not.

Richard Minkley 02:20

When did you start improvising with them?

Nick Tyler 02:23

Probably the session after.

Richard Minkley 02:25

Was it quite a quick turn around.

Nick Tyler 02:27

It was something like that? Yeah. At the time, it was when we were still living over on Mona Street, which is only a road away from here. So we'd only come back to Nottingham, I guess within about last nine months, because I've been away for a year, teaching in Wolverhampton after uni. Marilyn had stayed and then we moved back here together, and like knew no one because all of our university friends had fucked off.

Richard Minkley 02:49

So this was about two years after university, for you?

Nick Tyler 02:52

Yeah? yeah! yeah, it must be. Yeah. Because I, yeah, because we graduated in 19, shit, 99? Yeah, I don't know how old I am, Richard. I seem very young but in fact I'm very very old. But yeah, so it wasn't about 2001.

Richard Minkley 03:12

Okay.

Nick Tyler 03:12

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 03:13

What, that you had your, sorry, that you had your first foray with

Nick Tyler 03:17

Missimp.

Richard Minkley 03:17

Missimp? Okay.

Nick Tyler 03:18

That sounds about right.

Richard Minkley 03:19

2001? So, you got involved. Was that your first time doing improv?

Nick Tyler 03:25

No.

Richard Minkley 03:25

You'd done improv before?

Nick Tyler 03:27

Yeah we did, as, both Marilyn and I did improv a little bit at university. As mostly as warm ups in rehearsal for plays that we we're in the new theater. We both, we met when we both got cast in a play called Housemates. In my first year, Marilyn's second year of uni, written by a friend of ours, Stu Scott, who's also been along to Missimp things in the past. And has done some improv in London. Lovely fellow. Very tall. That's all I have to say about him, very tall. And, yes, we did some at uni. I'd done some when I was younger as a teenager. I helped a guy run the Burton Youth Theatre enterprise B.I.T.E. at the brew house in Burton on Trent, which was all improv. It was improv for kids and for teenagers. So I've done that for 2, 3, 4 years. Don't remember.

Richard Minkley 04:17

Do you remember what kind of improv they were doing when you joined? Well, when you... In fact what, what was the process of you joining the rehearsals? Was it... Because I'm assuming Marilyn was like, "I'm gonna go do this thing" and you came along. Is that right?

Nick Tyler 04:34

More or less, yeah. I just had a really bad job for a year and didn't really, didn't have, zero confidence, massive anxiety, smoking phenomenal amounts of weed to try and clamp all of that shit down, very unsuccessfully. and I just couldn't face the idea of taking part, all though in essence, it's a, it would have been a good thing for me to go and do. But I can cope with the idea of actually participating so I went along, because then I could observe and offer useful information with some background in theater and acting and stuff.

Richard Minkley 05:03

But then you quickly got involved.

Nick Tyler 05:04

Yeah, I can't actually trace that path.

Richard Minkley 05:08

Because you, I think I heard that right, you said you came, it was like the first one. There was one session you just watched and then it was the next session, you kind of got involved.

Nick Tyler 05:15

Well, I think so. It kind of been very long. Marilyn might have a bad bead on that. In fact, Ross, actually having a memory of use, might be able to tell us better. But it certainly wasn't very long. After that, we were rehearsing and... Must have rehearsing at Justin's place, up in Forest fields. I think, I feel like that was on a more or less weekly basis, like on a Saturday.

Richard Minkley 05:41

So was it basically like after one or two weeks you just kind of became part of the team as it were?

Nick Tyler 05:48

Yeah, I think so. I don't remember when I did the first show, because they were still doing little shows here and there. Because they'd previously had a bunch more people some of whom had left and gone to different exciting places or died or something like that. I don't really know. I don't know who those people were.

Richard Minkley 06:02

Okay

Nick Tyler 06:03

Who knows? I'd say Geoff's brother Andy was also performing occasionally or erratically with us. I don't know. First year, blur. Yeah? That said, I might have vague meeting minutes, minute notes, when we did rehearse. Because I tend to keep stuff like that.

Richard Minkley 06:25

That's interesting, because you've also got some, like bits of paper and stuff, that you brought with you.

Nick Tyler 06:29

Scribbled shit.

Richard Minkley 06:30

Did you used to do that a lot. Like, was that something that you just did? Or is it something that was required of you?

Nick Tyler 06:38

Never required, but I remember, in those days, when we were rehearsing up at Justin's. We were caught between, as we have, as we had been for 20 years, caught between fucking about and taking it a bit more seriously and trying to do something with it. And I think that idea, like do something with it. If that's more shows, do it better, reach out and find more people. All of those things are kind of nebulous concepts. And they've always, continuously fought against people's lack of time or/and arse'edness, which I think is a strong contender for being added to, you know, strong, weak forces of the universe that tie things together.

Richard Minkley 07:22

What, doing improv and fucking about?

Nick Tyler 07:22

Arse'edness. Arse'edness it's probably, it's certainly more powerful than gravity, which is a very weak force. Arse'edness that should be, it should be somewhere in physics.

Richard Minkley 07:29

Yeah. So you said that first year was a blur? How would you describe that first year other than a blur? Because what I'm trying to think is like at a certain point that... At a certain point, you are more than just, sort of, Marilyn's other half who happened to join in with the fun.

Nick Tyler 07:54

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 07:54

I'm trying to understand what that early stage for you was like.

Nick Tyler 07:57

I felt we were all more or less, on a par of, sort of, skill and background experience anyway, from fairly early on. Geoff may differ on that, I don't remember. "Nick? useless. Had to train him really hard. Never really succeeded". And I would be sympathetic to that view. But I don't, I don't recall there being any kind of divide between performance and anything else. If you're a part of that early group, it was a performance team, it wasn't a community. The whole the whole point was to perform places like, the maze and other places that we definitely performed. Damned if I can remember where they were.

Richard Minkley 08:34

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 08:35

I vaguely remember what the first gig I was in, I think, was at the maze.

Richard Minkley 08:37

I was gonna say, do you remember anything about that gig? That's the sound of someone who might not.

Nick Tyler 08:43

Well, what I remember most of all from getting into improv and and the slow curve over the years was crushing that, the anxiety and depression I went into it with, well not crushing it but the very, very low self esteem that came with, comes with those things. And not wanting to talk to an audience at all.

Richard Minkley 09:03

What do you mean the very low self esteem that come with those?

Nick Tyler 09:05

Oh, it comes with with depression and anxiety?

Richard Minkley 09:08

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 09:08

Yeah, I think very low self esteem is, i don't know, the third side of that triangle that I was happily bouncing around in. Like the fire triangle. You know, you have all those things and then you have fire. What is that? Ignition, air, oxygen and like can burn...

Richard Minkley 09:25

Oh like spark, like fuels,

Nick Tyler 09:27

Thats it

Richard Minkley 09:27

ignition and something else.

Nick Tyler 09:28

Yes. Yeah. So somehow, I don't know. Low self esteem is the fire that you get when you get the other good things in place.

Richard Minkley 09:34

So you saying like low self esteem is some sort of motivating force.

Nick Tyler 09:39

Or an anti-motivating force, I think. Again, it all plays to arse'edness. You know, if you got your triangle of despair, then you're not going to do anything. Because your particles can't get motivated to act and perform.

Richard Minkley 09:52

Okay.

Nick Tyler 09:53

But I certainly didn't want to be part of the group of people and to talk to an audience. That sounded awful. I think for me that was the bit that I really quailed away from, to begin with. You know, because obviously for any show, you've go and do your introduction, you got to ask-fors which even in the very early short form shows that Missimp was, the Mission Improbable was doing. Yeah, there was still all of that and there's quite a lot of audience interaction on that basis which I guess Geoff must have been doing a lot of.

Richard Minkley 10:23

So what was the.

Nick Tyler 10:24

And probably Justin.

Richard Minkley 10:25

What was the thing you got into it for then?

Nick Tyler 10:28

Well, it's a nice thing to do, you know. You need something to do, don't you. Certainly needed to do something to do. Nice things to Marilyn. And I'd certainly enjoy doing bits of improv previously and I like doing theatre stuff previously. Directed and acted at university and like that. So this was kind of like that without any of that awful learning shit.

Richard Minkley 10:48

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 10:48

Which is, which remains my, remains the appeal of improv for me. You don't have to learn anything. It's phenomenal. Just rock up and do it, accepting all the hours of rehearsal and stuff.

Richard Minkley 10:58

Okay.

Nick Tyler 10:58

yeah.

Richard Minkley 11:00

So what kind of improv were you doing, like when you first started? What kind of games did you play?

Nick Tyler 11:07

Okay.

Richard Minkley 11:07

It was short form, I understand.

Nick Tyler 11:08

Yeah, it was all entirely short form. And we did short form for a very long time. We probably. The first long form we ever did was custard riff which was

Richard Minkley 11:19

What?

Nick Tyler 11:20

I'm just enjoying your face, which was the first long form show we did. The first proper long form show we did at the Art Organization. Must've been as part one of the early Nottingham comedy festivals. And that was Steve Conlin's brainchild. He wanted to do a kind of a soap opera thing. Can not remember why it's called custard Riff. Oh, wasn't called custard riff. It's called cast adrift. But we all remember it as custard riff. cast adrift.

Richard Minkley 11:53

That is so disappointing.

Nick Tyler 11:57

Well, I don't know. Maybe it was. I don't, I don't, not sure I've got any graphics or art work from it? Custard riff, cast adrift. I can't remember which. Which one did we call it in the end? I don't know anymore.

Richard Minkley 12:08

I tell what lets.

Nick Tyler 12:09

Who knows.

Richard Minkley 12:10

Who knows. Before we get lost in the custard rift?

Nick Tyler 12:13

Beautiful place. What were we doing? What were we doing back in the day?

Richard Minkley 12:16

Yeah, what kind of games were you playing?

Nick Tyler 12:18

Mostly games that would be familiar so. Theres sort of, you had speaking with two heads games. Two heads speaking as one.

Richard Minkley 12:25

How, what's a two heads speaking?

Nick Tyler 12:27

So two people speaking simultaneously but saying one word each,

Richard Minkley 12:32

ok

Nick Tyler 12:32

Not one word each. Speaking simultaneously Two people saying exactly the same

Together(ish) 12:35

words the same time?

Nick Tyler 12:36

Don't don't check me. Theres certainly genre rollercoasters that we used to do. Around the world in really bad accidents was strong favourite for many years. One that has fallen away a little bit as times have changed. Which I deeply regret. I fucking love that game. There's nothing more fun than trying to do a French accent followed by german accent by scouse accent and all these things you can't really do. Zoltan, whose a guy who was around, i don't know, early 20 teens, used to do them all in exactly the same accent. Every single one [!?] would turn around go, "how was that?", "It was the same way you talk normally Zoltan. Its exactly the same way you normally talk". We certainly played that. And there were a bunch of sort of group games. I'm struggling to remember quite how they worked.

Richard Minkley 13:31

Do you remember what they were called?

Nick Tyler 13:33

Ones like a police report but it probably wasn't called that and it was semi scripted in that there were scripted lines, you know. "This week on police report" or whatever. And then that then you would consensually agree what you're going to say, so a little bit like the two heads talking as one. You'd come up with the crime together.

Richard Minkley 13:53

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 13:53

Somehow. Very odd and the situation. It's very strange game. Never sure whether I liked it. But we played a lot, so that's good. We played a game called stunt doubles you've probably never seen.

Richard Minkley 14:09

No, what's stunt doubles.

Nick Tyler 14:10

I don't know why we don't play some of these anymore. So stunt doubles, you got your ordinary, your scene going on as normal and then when something very dramatic happens, if you hear "stunt doubles!" and two other people come on as a stunt double for each of the people in the scene and perform a very over the top, possibly slow motion version whatever it is you're doing. So it might be "so, I'm gonna make a cup of tea for you Marjorie", "stunt doubles!", and two people come in doing huge actions and ridiculous nonsense. Or it could be a fight or a car crash, who knows what. That was great fun. I'd forgot about that one. That was a long time ago. God I don't know what else we used to play. I feel like there was plenty of the Irish drinking song.

Richard Minkley 14:56

The Irish drinking song.

Nick Tyler 14:57

Which I still absolutely loath.

Richard Minkley 14:59

Yeah?

Nick Tyler 15:00

Yeah, I just find it really hard and I can't really sing. Hard game and can't do it verbally, so, sweet. No, I found that really difficult. I never really enjoyed it. But i've certainly been in a few of them.

Richard Minkley 15:12

What is the Irish drinking song?

Nick Tyler 15:13

Iye di iye di iye die iye, iye di iye di iye and then you do, that's kind of the rhythm. It's a, yeah.

Richard Minkley 15:21

And then you make, is it a bit like hoedown on whose line?

Nick Tyler 15:24

Yes. I think they used to do both of them. I think hoedowns the harder of the two, but Irish drinking song is also difficult. I'm not sure any of the musical mob will have done it. The hell else did we play? There were lots of the very familiar short form games that we still play now. Whose Line, obviously. Alphabet games I'm pretty sure came from that time. Where you just running through the alphabet line by line each. It was games like that, I think TV channels even we had at that, we were playing back then. And a lot of games that were on Whose Line, so we did some of that, you know, world's worst line type stuff, you know. "What's the worst, what's the worst thing say at a funeral?" I can't even think of a. You see, its been, played it for so many years. I think even think what, I don't, i can't even think what would be inappropriate at a funeral anymore. In my head, they're like fine. "Yes that was your sister. I banged her.", I don't know. Its all fine. Its all fine. Just tell the truth. It's good. Yeah, those kinds of things. I'm wondering actually if, I've got lists somewhere of all, of like, all the games.

Richard Minkley 16:27

I tell you what. If it's written down, we can come back to it at some point.

Nick Tyler 16:30

Well, possibly written down. It might not be from that. Ah, there's just so many ridiculous games. Old job, new job, and things like that.

Richard Minkley 16:38

Old job, new job.

Nick Tyler 16:40

Jesus, trying to describe these things, trying to describe these things so hard.

Richard Minkley 16:44

Describing improv at best is like trying to describe a dream.

Nick Tyler 16:47

It is. Well yeah, there was, even the game for [once?] I've not played this one in probably 10 years. Oh, yeah. So you're starting a new job, but you're Your performance in that new job is heavily influenced by what your previous job was. So you might now be a dentist, but previously you were a serial killer. So you will bring that same serial killer panache, and style, and importantly terminology to your new role.

Richard Minkley 17:16

"The serial killer panache."

Nick Tyler 17:20

But even in several things, like you used to be a hairdresser, but now you're, i don't know whats even close, one of those people that sculpt hedges, so you bring all the previous style and flair, "Oh, something off the back, sir." And apply that to your new situation.

Richard Minkley 17:35

Okay.

Nick Tyler 17:35

This sounds terrible, the way I'm describing it, other people will definitely have better examples. That was lots of fun.

Richard Minkley 17:42

So, we're kind of describing the very earliest days for you in improv. You've come with Marilyn, you've, you've joined the team, or a part of the performance team. You're performing in pubs like the maze.

Nick Tyler 17:57

Yeah, I can't even remember where, where any of the other ones were.

Richard Minkley 18:00

Do you remember how long that sort of went on for? Or was it sort of just that repeated? rehearse? In fact, there's a question like, how often would you rehearse and perform?

Nick Tyler 18:12

You see, I feel like the rehearsals were weekly but they might not have been. And I guess there's maybe a monthly show. It was a matter of where Justin and Geoff could find a place to fit in or where Adey had found. Some pub Adey was frequenting and was like, well, they got a room there. We did things like the Buxton fringe and stuff like that. Whatever the other town is, that's near Buxton. Bakewell.

Richard Minkley 18:37

Okay

Nick Tyler 18:37

That's it.

Richard Minkley 18:38

Do you remember that show?

Nick Tyler 18:39

I remember bits of it because, [well] bits of it, because that must have been a little bit later. Because not that long after me, Ross and Marilyn joined, we also acquired a wonderful human named Clayton Fussel, who is a delightful person and I'll show you at some point. You know, I showed you some of the odd videos that...

Richard Minkley 18:58

Yes.

Nick Tyler 18:58

... Geoff and Ross used to make. One of them was operation breakfast, in which Clay features prominently hiding in our cupboard. Pushing things out, pushing mugs out the way.

Richard Minkley 19:10

Is he the reporter in the cupboard?

Nick Tyler 19:11

Yeah, that's Clayton.

Richard Minkley 19:12

Thats Clayton?

Nick Tyler 19:13

Yeah, yeah.

Richard Minkley 19:14

Oh my god.

Nick Tyler 19:14

Clays extraordinary

Richard Minkley 19:15

With like jam on his face.

Nick Tyler 19:15

That's right. So much fun to do. Not not half as if it was trying to get Ross to film, being the weather guy who's slicing a banana while talking. But unable to stop cracking up at the sound of a banana hitting the floor as he's saying it. It was carnage. I've no idea why we made it.

Richard Minkley 19:34

So

Nick Tyler 19:34

Must of been Russ' idea.

Richard Minkley 19:35

In the time scale of things where does operation, where does operation basket, breakfast, where does operation breakfast fall into the thing?

Nick Tyler 19:43

I reckon this is all like 2001 to 2006, I think. Because I think, because I think 2006 or so is when everyone moved away Clayton moved away, Just' moved away. And Geoff... No Geoff was still here at that point, because it's later that Geoff went away for six months. Moved to Canada for six months in Calgary with his wife, where they went to loose moose Theatre quite a lot, which is another improv joint up there.

Richard Minkley 20:12

Did he go to Loose Moose?

Nick Tyler 20:13

Uh huh.

Richard Minkley 20:15

God damn it, he didn't tell me that.

Nick Tyler 20:16

Did he not say that.

Richard Minkley 20:16

No.

Nick Tyler 20:17

Fucking useless.

Richard Minkley 20:17

Fucking useless.

Nick Tyler 20:18

Jesus man.

Richard Minkley 20:19

Jesus.

Nick Tyler 20:19

Yeah so he was I believe performing and taking part in drop-ins and jams and stuff there. While he was there for six months. And it was when, it was when he went to do that that I started took over like general running of things.

Richard Minkley 20:34

And with that 2006?

Nick Tyler 20:36

maybe

Richard Minkley 20:37

So hang on so... Because I'm assuming it wasn't part of the team, part of the team, part of the team, just constantly, and then all of a sudden he was leaving and you picked it up. Like, did you begin to take on more responsibility as those years when on?

Nick Tyler 20:53

There wasn't a lot of responsibilities take, really, because we weren't, we weren't doing much, you know. Although we'd have meetings occasionally and like chat about what we wanted to do. There were some logistics which I think Just' and Geoff are mostly doing and that was about getting Dumpy and his keyboard round, because we have Simon, Simon Dumbarton with us, by that point.

Richard Minkley 21:10

Also known as dumpy?

Nick Tyler 21:11

Dumpy. Amazing. Yeah, he was our musician. So we had keyboard sound effects, as well as providing the music for the Irish drinking song and stuff like that. But yeah, he'd do sound effects for genre roller coaster and sort of background music. Very chilling, very cool. I think he lived up in Sheffield.

Richard Minkley 21:32

And he would travel down to perform?

Nick Tyler 21:35

Yeah, I remember being jammed to the back of Geoff's smart car going up to Sheffield, in the boot of a smart car. Because at that point I was still narrow enough, I might still be able to, narrow enough that I could fit sideways in a smart car boot.

Richard Minkley 21:46

Right.

Nick Tyler 21:46

I was horribly ill when we got there. That's the worst way to travel.

Richard Minkley 21:49

Yeah?

Nick Tyler 21:49

Felt like death the whole time. Like being in a bumper car. It's awful. Not good, not good. But nice to be able to see dumpy.

Richard Minkley 21:56

Okay.

Nick Tyler 21:58

That was, that was cool. So yeah, I'd say we were performing in different places. We were making these weird videos because.

Richard Minkley 22:04

When did you start making weird videos?

Nick Tyler 22:06

Only Ross would know or indeed the YouTube channel with the upload dates. That might be a good hint.

Richard Minkley 22:10

That might be a more reliable source.

Nick Tyler 22:11

Yeah, it probably would be.

Richard Minkley 22:12

Do you remember why those came about?

Nick Tyler 22:15

It was Ross and, it was Russ who wanted to do them, I think, because Ross did a lot of sketch writing performance at university. He was in a couple of really quite good sketch shows, at uni. I was in a couple that he was writing sketches for. So was Marilyn.

Richard Minkley 22:28

Oh, you went to university with Ross?

Nick Tyler 22:30

Yes.

Richard Minkley 22:30

oh, okay.

Nick Tyler 22:31

Yeah, he was. He was on doing his MA I think, having previously been in Hull or somewhere. Like some godforsaken shithole. Or Brighton. I can't remember which. Its either nice or awful. Yeah, so he was a year out from me, but he was certainly around when Marilyn and I were both at New Theater and then. I feel like he and Stu Scott with a brain children? Brain producers? Of the two sketch shows that we were in at uni.

Richard Minkley 23:00

You just said two things. Oh, what's his, Scott?

Nick Tyler 23:04

Stu Scott, Stuart Scott.

Richard Minkley 23:05

Stuart Scott was at university with you.

Nick Tyler 23:07

Yes.

Richard Minkley 23:07

Did you go to University in Nottingham?

Nick Tyler 23:09

Yes.

Richard Minkley 23:09

And that's where you worked at The New Theatre.

Nick Tyler 23:11

Yep.

Richard Minkley 23:11

Did you do an improv at university? Or was it like...

Nick Tyler 23:14

There was no improv society then. We only we only did, we did, we did lots of improv games. Both Stuart Scott and Claire Mackenzie, who was the producer and director respectively of the first play I was in, both knew a lot of these games from theatre stuff and I'd done some previously and so

recognized them. But no, there was no, there was no Improv Soc. Didn't exist at the time. There were no improv shows.

Richard Minkley 23:35

But you did plays at the new theater?

Nick Tyler 23:38

Yeah, I did... directed The Changeling lovely play by Middleton and Rowley. Another play, In Absentia Amo Te, which was about two gay guys falling in love across the internet.

Richard Minkley 23:52

okay.

Nick Tyler 23:52

Written by a guy at uni. That was cool. Some other bits and bobs. Did 24 hour plays while we're there, which are exhausting.

Richard Minkley 23:58

24 hour plays?

Nick Tyler 24:00

Yeah, so you'd, you'd rock up at, i don't know, seven o'clock in the evening, and they would go, "Right? We're going to do this play. So we're going to learn it. We're going to cast it, we're going to learn it. We're going to build the staging and make the costumes and do the publicity. And then in 24 hours time we'll perform it."

Richard Minkley 24:17

Whoa.

Nick Tyler 24:18

Terrible idea. Knackering. Truly exhausting. I can't remember what. First time we did a version of Hamlet.

Richard Minkley 24:28

Sorry, Hamlet in 24 hours sounds like a challenge.

Nick Tyler 24:31

No, it was fine. We did in like a half. We did a 20 minute version, you know.

Richard Minkley 24:35

Okay.

Nick Tyler 24:35

Because learning the three hours would be a nightmare. I was Ophelia And I was, because back then I didn't have a beard and I had lovely long blonde hair. And could could pass quite easily for a girl if I wished, without speaking. I remember we had a gravestone on a skateboard that you'd kick on to stage. But the thing I like about that, and the thing that we brought back later and when we started playing things like Half Life. As we did, we did that we did the hamlet play, first off in 20 minutes, and

then we did a five minute version, then a three minute version, and then maybe a one minute version, and then did the one minute version backwards. Which is quite a head fuck when you've already been up for, probably 36 hours, because who gets up at seven o'clock in the evening. And so yeah, as Ophelia initially I'd drown by having water thrown in my face. But for the reverse way, I just had a mouthful and just sprayed it all over the audience. Very satisfying. So that's a nice tangent.

Richard Minkley 25:31

That was a beautiful tangent. So, okay, so you kind of brought us up to 2006.

Nick Tyler 25:35

Oh, and Ross and Geoff wanted to do sketches. Yeah. Oh, it wasn't just sketches. It was sketches and educational videos, which is why we did the Gregor Mendel rap. Which is Ross's masterpiece. And why Geoff and Ross did the rock cycle.

Richard Minkley 25:55

Made with caramel?

Nick Tyler 25:56

Yeah, with the caramel, or toffee. I don't know what it is. Yeah. "The rock cycle". Wonderful. And conkers and other stupid stupid things.

Richard Minkley 26:06

So in 2006, you said,

Nick Tyler 26:09

Well, hey, don't put on me like, like I said that as if it was like true.

Richard Minkley 26:12

You said at three minutes past 12, on Friday the 19.

Nick Tyler 26:17

Right...

Richard Minkley 26:17

No you didn't.

Nick Tyler 26:18

At some point.

Richard Minkley 26:20

Do you remem... This is the question.

Nick Tyler 26:22

Aw man.

Richard Minkley 26:22

Do remember when that switch, is it, wasn't even a switch or was it...?

Nick Tyler 26:28

I don't know what you mean, what you mean by switch? I think what happened is at some point during between, must have between like 2004 in 2006, we lost a lot of core players for the team who went to different places. And performing was. We still did occasionally, I think. But it was harder to get everyone in the same place and harder, and we didn't have enough people fundamentally. And that's when we started running the jams, improv jams, the drop ins. And that started at the Nottingham Arts Theatre. In the room upstairs, because Geoff, as he's done, every time we move pretty much, found us a venue, very well connected Geoff.

Richard Minkley 27:11

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 27:11

Very well organized. And that was a fucking chaos of a room.

Richard Minkley 27:17

So, do you remember what, about what time you move to The Arts theatre was that...

Nick Tyler 27:20

No.

Richard Minkley 27:21

2004?

Nick Tyler 27:22

Ah, God. I feel .

Richard Minkley 27:24

Ok, but you moved on.

Nick Tyler 27:25

I feel like we've even, we've even got the year in the, in the About Us on the Missimp website. I think we've worked that one out.

Richard Minkley 27:32

I'll have to look into that.

Nick Tyler 27:33

I think we've actually got that one right.

Richard Minkley 27:34

Do you remember wa? Do you remember the first time you went to the Arts theatre? For improv?

Nick Tyler 27:42

Not the first time, because they... it was every week. Every week there was, I don't think there was, there was a first, like, special time.

Richard Minkley 27:51

Special time.

Nick Tyler 27:53

Special time.

Richard Minkley 27:53

So what do you remember about it, doing improv at the Arts theatre?

Nick Tyler 27:56

Oh, it was great. I mean, they had a wonderful time for you to double or triple booked the room. That was epic. That was really helpful. Also, the room was in tatters. There were like serious leaks at one end and bits where the floor was missing. So a great massive room but fucking lethal.

Richard Minkley 28:11

I still, people have said it had holes in the floor. I'm still [quiz?] like, I'm still curious.

Nick Tyler 28:18

Not in the main stage. You had to go to like all the way to one end find the holes in the floor. It wasn't like skipping over a hole to do a scene or anything like that.

Richard Minkley 28:25

Well like, how big was this hole?

Nick Tyler 28:27

Oh like a couple of feet across. Yeah, these were

Richard Minkley 28:28

Feet across!?!

Nick Tyler 28:29

These were holes. Holes, man. Like real holes. Fucking holes. You know holes. This is a hole.

Richard Minkley 28:35

Okay, yeah, like, okay. I suppose it was a real fucking hole then.

Nick Tyler 28:39

Yeah, a real fucking hole. i don't know what other definition you want from me, man. There was that and. Oh, and we'd have to go and get the key and we were supposed to, everyone was supposed to sign in. It was that kind of place.

Richard Minkley 28:52

Where you're doing the same kind of improv?

Nick Tyler 28:54

Yeah, we were expanding the number of games we played so we could do more stuff on a weekly basis. And it was at this point that we started more clearly doing you know warm up games, as distinct from just, "let's do a thing". Because we'd, I'd always be there, Marilyn would always be there, because it became, very quickly, became our [preferred] thing to do on a Thursday. Which obviously it

stayed my thing to do on a Thursday for the last 15 years, which is really convenient because I don't know what else I'd do in the week, other than like on the sofa and drink. I don't know. As you can attest, see from Lego around you, I'd probably play with Lego.

Richard Minkley 29:30

For people at home, there is a fantastic amount of Lego in this room.

Nick Tyler 29:34

Lovely current build right next to your head.

Richard Minkley 29:35

Oh, yes. quite.

Nick Tyler 29:36

Pretty.

Richard Minkley 29:37

What is that?

Nick Tyler 29:38

It's kind of a castle shrine. You can't see it. You're looking at one side of it, which isn't very helpful.

Richard Minkley 29:42

Yeah, well, it's beautiful.

Nick Tyler 29:44

Its pretty, its nice.

Richard Minkley 29:45

So...

Nick Tyler 29:49

Go on, you can you can do a question.

Richard Minkley 29:52

Thanks. Your faith in me is very encouraging.

Nick Tyler 29:55

Well, you know. You've asked some so far so I think you can keep it going.

Richard Minkley 29:59

So we're in The Arts theatre. You said that this was about the time that you started having jams, drop-in's.

Nick Tyler 30:08

That's why we moved to the Arts. That's why we started doing the Arts theatre stuff at all, because we didn't have enough people really to reliably do shows. This is when... This must have been just before Ross had his first kid and stuff like that. And so he soon became unavailable to. So we lost a lot of

people that had become core drivers of, you know, activity and stuff. I don't remember who suggested doing jams. Probably me or Geoff. Or both of us, speaking in the same voice. And then we try to, you know, we, i mean, we did some advertising trying, you know, to let people know it was there. Because otherwise of course, it would just be as turning up. "Oh, look. It's still just us. Weird." It took a long time before we got a real, you know, regular flow of people. That's where we got like lovely people. I wonder if thats when Rupes first turned up. When we're still up in the Arts Theatre or not. I'm not sure because we don't have many people still in Nottingham from way back then. Because that was a time when, that was when I got new people like Dan Barnes, who you've met. Really tall guy.

Richard Minkley 31:14

Did I meet him at the 20th anniversary?

Nick Tyler 31:15

Yeah, you'll have met Dan there. And Zoltan [Berry?]. Andrew [Pegs?] who's now in London. And I must have dragged some people from probation, where I was working, at some point. Its probably when Carla probably came a couple of times.

Richard Minkley 31:31

What, people on probation, or?

Nick Tyler 31:33

Yeah yeah, no. Poor suckers I worked with. [Carla?] might not have join us til later. Better but it was so, such a mixed, like, whether or not people turn, will there not be enough people turning up. So we spent a lot of time in the pub instead.

Richard Minkley 31:47

Fair enough.

Nick Tyler 31:48

Well, yeah, because if less than four people came we went, "we're going to the pub".

Richard Minkley 31:51

Was it as conscious a fact, that you would going to the Arts theatre and trying to have jams that we're open to people, rather than just rehearsals? Was that an active, actual response to people moving away, or was it something that just fell about?

Nick Tyler 32:08

Yeah, no it was a response. It was a definite response to that because, the desire was to get more people. Anyway, you get more people, it's just, its advertised and play, a little bit. But none of us was super motivated towards doing shows with having so many people having moved away. But we wanted to keep doing improv.

Richard Minkley 32:25

What was the effects of having that change?

Nick Tyler 32:33

I don't know. I'm not sure how much, what do you mean by effect?

Richard Minkley 32:39

So assuming that if you open it up, more people did turn up.

Nick Tyler 32:42

Yes. Slowly, over time, erratically, randomly.

Richard Minkley 32:45

So how did it feel to have, were you, was it just mates turning up?

Nick Tyler 32:52

I see.

Richard Minkley 32:52

Or was it mostly strangers?

Nick Tyler 32:54

No, no. There's mostly strangers. Some are very odd.

Richard Minkley 32:59

Because you've been doing it for about three or four years now.

Nick Tyler 33:02

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 33:02

And all of a sudden, you've got strangers coming into your team.

Nick Tyler 33:04

Well, that's nice, but it wasn't things we weren't, we weren't really performing at that point. The performances had slacked off, must have been completely. So this is the only improv we're doing. So it was like a Thursday evening fun thing to do. It's quite nice. We were teaching new people how to play the games. Because we're only really playing the games. Open scenes were way, and doing stuff without any any rules, was way ahead. That was another, I don't know, five or six years away, I guess, when we started doing that stuff. So, that was really nice. You get people come in and they play the games and it didn't feel very judgmental. It felt quite like, "Cool. We're doing a thing". We didn't really have rules of improv. None of us had done formal studying. I don't know. I think Geoff had read impro. I still don't care for reading improv books. Doesn't do anything for me. None of us really had any formal training in that. Marilyn is a trained actor and that helped. And, you know, bunch of us have done a lot of theater and comedy stuff in the past and that helps a lot. We didn't have the rules that were described. Now we played a lot of games like, 'yes and', 'yes and' game, 'yes but' game, which you can use and has those, the same central techniques, but it wasn't codified in any way. So I think we were probably learning. And I've seen that in some of my, some of my notes. There's bits of like, "well, this works better if we don't call each other wankers". "If we all agree..". And there's loads of like when, "details good" and yeah, "if we agree on detail". So we were sort of, I guess, vaguely arranging a concept of what it was that we were doing in improv, in addition to just playing these games with rules, and that was slowly cohering as we, as I think you do when you have to show someone else how to do it. You go, "What the hell is it that I do? don't know"

Richard Minkley 34:46

So, like, the act of trying to teach someone else, it almost had a reflexive thing of teaching you more about what you do.

Nick Tyler 34:51

Yeah. And I think it does every subject. You know, you know though. When you get someone who goes, "I need to do this thing in Photoshop". You're like, "Well, I know how to do that thing. So you do... Oh my god. I don't know how to do this any more. Why does this work? I should explain some context here." And you have to generate context and philosophy inevitably emerges from that, of why you think something's working or things don't.

Richard Minkley 35:09

Okay. So then is that a description of The Arts Theatre time as a whole? That kind of process of learning to run jams, not really doing shows. Because you said that the shows had kind of trailed off?

Nick Tyler 35:24

Yeah, that's probably fair. Yeah, they had I don't know exactly when. I think it was partly because we didn't have enough people. And it's a lot of hassle to arrange. You have to go and talk to people, which I never wanted to do in any context. It's why Geoff and Just' was so good at all that stuff. It's only much later, I've had any interest in talking to people. And actually arranging things, or more importantly, comparing, talking to an audience. Didn't want to do that for a long time.

Richard Minkley 35:48

Do you remember when that changed and you were like, "actually, this is quite fun"?

Nick Tyler 35:52

I suspect it's from doing it, I ended up running an awful lot of the jams at the Arts theatre. Certainly at some point. I don't know if that was while we were there, but it was certainly some point I was running almost all of them for years at a stretch. And a lot of the ones when we moved, after that, to the Art Organization on station street, where Hopkinson is now.

Richard Minkley 36:10

Is there anything else that happened before you move to the Art Organization?

Nick Tyler 36:13

I don't know.

Richard Minkley 36:13

It's a big question, isn't it.

Nick Tyler 36:16

I got no idea. I met a lot of cool people. Made a lot of friends who are still friends now, even if I don't see them doing improv anymore. It's a lot of that, there must have been some other shows that we did. But that whole lot's patchy. I've got no video from that time. I might have some random scattered notes. Geoff may have some more stuff than I do. Justin might, because between them they were doing poster design and stuff. So we always had posters. I think I've got a very early poster somewhere, which would be quite fun. People's faces in starbursts. It was adorable. Before my time, I

wouldn't have done that. But it was fine. Yeah, I can't remember what else happened. For me, It was much more of a social activity.

Richard Minkley 37:03

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 37:04

Oh, yeah. And it still is. I like going on a Thursday night because we go to the pub afterwards and chat with people for a couple hours.

Richard Minkley 37:11

Would you say that's a very important connection then?

Nick Tyler 37:14

That's the most important important part for me. Yeah, so, yeah. The social aspect for sure. Yeah. I mean, I've never wanted to do this professionally. I don't do it professionally. I never wanted to run this as a business. And I don't really run it as a business. Other people do most of the running of that, now, thankfully. Hopefully even more in the future. Yeah, I never want this to be to be a career. This has always only been a fun thing, for me. and if and when it's when it's not being fun, I don't want to do it. And [i've, the same, pretty much?] fucking hated it and haven't wanted to do it. But if you don't keep it going, it'll just die. My view has always been I've just been keeping this thing going until someone will pick it up and run, do it properly. Because there have been lots of places where it could have just stopped.

Richard Minkley 37:15

The most important part of improv. Pub. I was going to say like, it feels like we've had a couple of those moments.

Nick Tyler 38:02

Yeah, they've been lots of them.

Richard Minkley 38:04

As in like, in the period we've been talking about.

Nick Tyler 38:06

Yeah, yes. And certainly when, yeah, when we stopped doing shows, lots of people left, we could have just stopped then. That would have been easy to do. And when Geoff moved to Calgary for six months, that would have been very easy to just stop doing and just go, "i can't be arse'd" and the places when we only had one or two people show up to do a thing on a Thursday night. You're like "is this worth it?" But then, as I said, we'd just go to the pub. "Lets go to Broadway across the road and have a couple of pints. Well, this is this is also fine, as either we do some improv and go to the pub, or we go to the pub". no real loss. I think I've retained that sense of feeling for it. certainly later.

Richard Minkley 38:43

So why didn't you give up? Like, why didn't it die? Because there was those moments where like, Geoff went away, people moved away. You had a smaller team. And you were part, I believe, the way you've described it, you were part of that bringing people in and doing more running the jam. Why did you keep it going?

Nick Tyler 39:02

I don't know, I think I'm a bit of a sucker if someone give me responsibility for something. I'm not, i don't, I find that hard to then duck out of. Even though it's bullshit and you can just go and you can say "no". I'm really not very good at that. Which i, in some ways, regret. I would have been happier and better off if I was better at saying no to that sort of stuff.

Richard Minkley 39:20

So is this just 20 years of peer pressure?

Nick Tyler 39:23

Yes.

Richard Minkley 39:23

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 39:23

Yes, it is. Yup, yes, it is.

Richard Minkley 39:25

That was supposed to be a joke, but i [can't really object?]

Nick Tyler 39:28

No, no, that. Its sort of what it. Its sort of what it is, or peer pressure on behalf of peers who aren't there, I guess.

Richard Minkley 39:33

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 39:34

Yeah, it felt like it was a fun thing to do and that people enjoyed when they did it. And should, should continue. But yeah, I've always, desperately wanted someone to take it over. Just because I've had. It's been a long time of being the person notionally in charge, and not necessarily being able to turn up and fuck about. Its been a long time since, i've been able to do that. That's why I like it when other people run gorilla burger. As we got this month. I think Lee's running this month. I just turn up, might even open a cupboard. Might sorts of names into a hat, maybe. Then I'll just drink and play. It was one that's been one of the nicest things in the last four years of not having to be in all the shows. That's great. But that's jumping a long way ahead.

Richard Minkley 39:57

Yeah. Yeah, i was going to say.

Nick Tyler 40:23

Thats jumping a long way ahead, isn't it? That's naughty. According to your ridiculous chronological narrative bullshit.

Richard Minkley 40:29

This ridiculous trying to put things in order. To be fair, sitting in this room, order and precision and everything in its right place, I suppose. Isn't the...

Nick Tyler 40:40

I don't know what you mean, Richard.

Richard Minkley 40:43

I mean, if there's a surface it also has Lego. That's kind of what I mean.

Nick Tyler 40:46

Yeah. Well, I'm not just, not necessarily just lego. It's not just my awful mess.

Richard Minkley 40:50

Anyway. No. Enough about lego.

Nick Tyler 40:51

I want to be clear on that, its also Marilyn's awful mess.

Richard Minkley 40:53

Enough about lego.

Nick Tyler 40:54

This is a shared state.

Richard Minkley 40:54

Enough about out of the chronology.

Nick Tyler 40:56

Alright fine.

Richard Minkley 40:56

Tell me when the first time, when did you first do, when did Missimp? No.

Nick Tyler 41:02

I thought you had a question?

Richard Minkley 41:05

I do. The problem is I have 16 questions, and I'm like, how can I do all of them at once?

Nick Tyler 41:10

Ask them sequentially, man. I won't answer any.

Richard Minkley 41:12

When was your first time going to the Arts Org, with Missimp?

Nick Tyler 41:18

That would be a time after we left the Nottingham Arts theatre.

Richard Minkley 41:23

Okay, so was it sort of like the Arts theatre...

Nick Tyler 41:25

The Arts theatre became increasingly unreliable and they changed management at some point. I can't remember that was before or after I took a leading role in their production of Dracula. As Jonathan Harker in Dracula at the Nottingham Arts Theatre for reasons that escaped me. I was very bad at it.

Richard Minkley 41:45

Wait, isn't the like accountant guy who goes to look after...?

Nick Tyler 41:48

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 41:49

Oh, wow.

Nick Tyler 41:50

So basically the lead apart from Dracula, which was a more fun role.

Richard Minkley 41:53

Yeah, I can imagine.

Nick Tyler 41:55

Yeah, we spent like nine weeks doing blocking before getting into doing the actual scene work. So, that was hideous.

Richard Minkley 42:00

How was that from an improvisers point of view?

Nick Tyler 42:04

Fuckin awful.

Richard Minkley 42:05

fucking awful?

Nick Tyler 42:05

It's just nightmarish. I took so long to learn the lines. I hated learning them.

Richard Minkley 42:10

So, they became increasingly unreliable.

Nick Tyler 42:13

Yeah, we'd get double booked, triple booked, it was leaking, It was very bad. And Geoff had certainly been looking around for a place to go that might be a little more stable. And at that point it was a nice guy named Liam running the organization. Probably still is as the Hopkins, in fact, it is isn't it? Liam Woodgates. And for reasons that are unclear he said yes. Presumably because he had a nice space on the first floor that. Really nice studio space is now full of like vintage shops which, is great but to my

mind is a waste of space, because there could be improv in there. Really nice studio. Stripped wood flooring. Just like big walls and windows. Ah, it was a lovely place.

Richard Minkley 42:54

So was it the ground floor that you...?

Nick Tyler 42:55

No, first floor, First floor. Oh no, sorry. Ground floor we performed in, we rehearsed on the first floor.

Richard Minkley 42:56

First floor?

Nick Tyler 42:56

First floor.

Richard Minkley 42:56

First floor, that you performed in? Okay.

Nick Tyler 43:01

So yeah, we started doing that. We shifted the jam to there. Must have been around about the same time that we finally got a website of some form. I think, I think Geoff might have had a very old Missimp.co.uk website back in the olden days. Then we used to put stuff on a website doesn't exist anymore called posterous, which...

Richard Minkley 43:18

Posterous?

Nick Tyler 43:19

Posterous.

Richard Minkley 43:19

Whats Posterous?

Nick Tyler 43:20

It doesn't exist anymore. It was a very, very simple, actually, you know, Tumblrs probably its closest analog. But it was very easy just to put up, just to shove a picture up, with a description, like you know, a poster for whatever. Because remember, this is almost even before facebook.

Richard Minkley 43:36

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 43:38

Whens facebook, 2010?

Richard Minkley 43:41

2007, maybe.

Nick Tyler 43:41

Maybe. I feel like we joined Facebook in probably 2008. So it's probably some really old posts, if there's any way of looking that far down a Facebook wall. I don't know if there is. Probably have to download it all as a CSV file, or something, and scream while you look at it. Yeah, I remember showing some Posterous. That was quite handy for a while.

Richard Minkley 43:59

Okay.

Nick Tyler 44:00

Trying to advertise the drop-ins are happening. So at least you've got some internet reference place. God knows where else we told people we're doing it from.

Richard Minkley 44:08

But. Wait, so, you would, was it that you were trying to put more stuff out there, or was it that you, the internet happened and you suddenly found there are more ways to connect to people?

Nick Tyler 44:19

Bit of both. Bit of both. It was it was available. And we still wanted to attract people to the Jams, you know. We'd inevitably you'd change venue, you'd lose some people anyway, more people move away. The jams, once we moved to the Art Org, it just felt like a better space. I think that must be when I was running almost all of them. Every fucking week. Which grinds you down a little bit after a while. Where you're like, literally, you're still just playing games. You've got maybe 30 games to reshuffle, "play these ones this week, and these ones next week" "it's the same as last week". But as I was looking at the plans like with increasingly different focus. Like, we'll try, we'll play these games focusing on character, play these games focusing on detail. Because I like short phone games, I still think they're really important because they teach you different skill sets. They teach you different things to focus on in a scene. Genre rollercoaster teaches you about who are your characters and how can your characters persist through, in different scenarios and different locations. Played really well, genre roller coaster is a long form game where you take the same characters and put them in different scenarios and different situations. It's your tag outs, and your freeze edits from Vox pops and everything else. It's the same game. Loads and loads of short form games are. And we played a lot of them in sequence tell a story using these games. The first part storys here, second part of the storys this game, start in Whose Line move into alphabet game, continue the characters and continue the storyline and their fun.

Richard Minkley 45:47

Wait, you used to do a full story through lots of different games?

Nick Tyler 45:51

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 45:51

Where did you do that?

Nick Tyler 45:52

We'd do. Just do it in. Just used to do it in the jams. It was fun. We used to do... I think I've got the audio of the one we did on talk like a pirate day. Where we just did. We'd do it on a pirates quest,

through a bunch of games. All in like, pirate accent and characters. I'll try and find that for you because I think I think that's probably awful, but I remember it being really fun.

Richard Minkley 46:13

They, honestly, there's gonna be all sorts of awful things in this thing. We're coming to the end of the first half of the interview.

Nick Tyler 46:22

I feel like we need some dates, don't we. This is really bad.

Richard Minkley 46:24

No no no, there's lots of interesting stuff here. But. This is a weird question.

Nick Tyler 46:32

All right, that'll be different from the others.

Richard Minkley 46:35

You are the most saucy bitch in this podcast. Oh my god. No.

Nick Tyler 46:40

Its Monday, I've been at work.

Richard Minkley 46:41

Yeah, same. But like you... If we could go back and talk to the Nick at that point, who's just maybe, just before the Arts Org. You're in the thing and you're running all of these jams and drop ins.

Nick Tyler 46:56

He's very stoned.

Richard Minkley 46:58

He's very stoned. I was gonna say, what does he make of that change from where he was before?

Nick Tyler 47:05

It was a lot closer to the train station. That was sweet.

Richard Minkley 47:09

Yeah?

Nick Tyler 47:09

Given that we get to Nottingham from Beeston by train, that was great. Phenomenal. I always a big fan of any venues that are near the train station. So that was really good. And it brought us closer to some cheaper pubs for drinking afterwards. Also important. It felt like, it did feel like a change. It felt like, it felt like we got a lot of new, new people who, some of whom you'd recognize now, when we moved to the Art Org. And that could only have been the happenstance of the timing. But it felt very different. I think it's because it wasn't such a dingy, damp riddled, floor-holed space.

Richard Minkley 47:46

You feel like a community yet?

Nick Tyler 47:48

Yeah. And I think it was feeling. I think partly because we weren't really doing shows. There must have been the odd show that we did in those years, but. I think because we weren't doing shows it was feeling more community, it was feeling, even though the art, even at the Arts theatre, it was feeling a lot more like some mates, fucking around on the Thursday. Felt, it was more like a book group. But rather than reading a book, you're making stuff up.

Richard Minkley 48:14

So it was bigger than, than just a small group of people that he was at the beginning?

Nick Tyler 48:18

Yeah?

Richard Minkley 48:19

But he didn't quite feel like an actual community and like would you call it,

Nick Tyler 48:24

there was a

Richard Minkley 48:24

would you have called it a community back then?

Nick Tyler 48:26

No, probably not. I think we're just call it the jams and the people who came to the jams. Seemed succinct. Yeah, I don't know when we started calling it a community. Or when it started feeling like it. I think it probably started feeling like a community once we had, once we're doing shows again, and there are people that were around the shows as well as in them.

Richard Minkley 48:45

Okay. Fair enough. Let's pause there...

Nick Tyler 48:48

Alright.

Richard Minkley 48:48

... and we'll come back to talk about the Arts Theatre some more. Not the Arts Theatre.

Nick Tyler 48:51

I'll make you more peppermint tea.

Richard Minkley 48:52

Yes.

b) Part 2 of 2

9th March 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, Glee, Glee Club, felt, improv, jams, art, fucking, shows, parrot, org, form, space, nice, games, moved, set, stage, Liam, audience

SPEAKERS

Nick Tyler, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

We are back. It is 10 to nine, Monday 9th March 2020. Richard Minkley interviewing Nick Tyler for the Missimp oral history project. We were just talking about the Arts Organization. And were you doing... Well, it feels like there's a change that happens there. Between the way you're running things at the Arts theatre and the way you run things or the Arts Org. What was that change?

Nick Tyler 00:13

Yeah, I don't know. I don't know if it was that clear a change but it certainly feels like it was in my head. Once we got to the Art Org. We started to get a more regular number of people turning up. More eager people were showing up and people who had a stronger interest in performing.

Richard Minkley 00:22

Do you remember, who would that be?

Nick Tyler 00:25

Who would that be? Who would that be, from my lovely list of names? I'm not I'm not sure.

Richard Minkley 00:29

But was it? Was it, general feeling of people wanting to do something with this.

Nick Tyler 00:31

There was a general feeling that, we. There was also like a vague thing that we were now somewhere that we could maybe perform, and that maybe we had enough people who were good enough to stick on stage and who were interested to stick on stage. Because I think it was 2000 and... December 2008, I think was our first show at the Art Organization. And I believe that was called the Knights of jam a lot.

Richard Minkley 00:46

That's interesting. So, I've got around 2004 to 2006 you were at the Arts theatre. Do you remember what date you moved to the, not the date but the rough year?

Nick Tyler 00:51

No, I think it's probably late 2007, early 2008.

Richard Minkley 01:45

Okay, so.

Nick Tyler 01:47

Again, that date might be on our about us. At some point we worked some of this out because this, the bleakness of trying to figure out any dates.

Richard Minkley 01:53

No, that's fair enough. So do you remember anything of your first show at the Arts Theatre, at the Art Org.

Nick Tyler 02:01

No, I don't remember that one very well. I remember some of the ones after it more clearly. Is this just, it's just before December. Done a jolly yellow poster with a castle on it.

Richard Minkley 02:13

Do you remember. So let's focus on then. Then what what do you remember of those shows? What were they like?

Nick Tyler 02:18

They were really fun. I really enjoyed them. I fact, in many ways, I don't think I've ever enjoyed shows as much as those ones we did the Art Org. I think they were, they were very high energy. They were very chaotic. Some of it was not good.

Richard Minkley 02:33

What do you mean not good?

Nick Tyler 02:35

Well, I say not, not good by our current standards of, "Oh, clever, intelligent long form that links back and loops together". Which is one [standard] of it doesn't really matter.

Richard Minkley 02:44

(Meaning it was) bad long form or?

Nick Tyler 02:47

Yeah, if we'd been doing long form, it would have been bad long form but since we weren't doing long form, who fucking cares?

Richard Minkley 02:51

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 02:52

I think we we're doing very enthusiastic, very silly short form.

Richard Minkley 02:56

Okay.

Nick Tyler 02:57

A lot, most those games you'd recognize now from when we play them at gorilla burger. And they were great. And that was certainly when I was comparing. Must have compared something before then but (as someone) when I felt like I was, if not, not quite in charge but leading our small community in some way. And we'd all meet to plan what was going to be in the show. Not just people who are in the shows but other people in that improv group people that came to the jams. We used to meet, meet up at Broadway. Like three hours on a Sunday, and drink and write lists of games that maybe, "maybe we should play that game", "Dunno", "What should we call this month?" "Its gonna be warm. What about sizzler?" And then I'd go away and I do a poster that fit whatever we described. Like 'the day after improv' was based on the day after tomorrow poster, but with sand instead of ice,. which is quite pleasing because it was in summer. There are lots of, sort of, bad puns on that basis. But it was just really fun deciding what games you're going to play together, "we're going to do these things and do the games that we enjoy playing. And then go on stage and do them". And we were building the stage before we did it every time. Because there were these great massive old sound boards that we'd positioned carefully on top of a range of pallet crates that you had to arrange in the right configuration. Otherwise, you couldn't fit these three gigantic slabs of board on top of them. And that took hours. Certainly at some point we made enough money and spend enough time doing it. Because we were just making money every month from it. We weren't spending the money on anything. We didn't have a bank account or everything. Literally in a box upstairs for many years. And we made enough money because we were getting, i think even the early shows got like 40-50 people in. And then we got 90 people for some of the shows down there in that Art Organization space. It was crazy. (Its) a three quid, end of the month, Bring Your Own booze. Phenomenal. People used to bring like 12 packs of cider and get absolutely twatted. We've had to kick people out because they're so drunk they're yelling. They were phenomenal. It was so much fun.

Richard Minkley 05:03

Why? Why? I mean, I feel like you maybe just told me that but why do you think the Arts Organization show worked so well?

Nick Tyler 05:11

Well, the Arts Org didn't give a fuck what we did. That was really important. Liam didn't care. It was like, just don't trash the space, we'll find you chairs somewhere. I think (its cos) we were in a really nice point of feeling quite confident with the short form we're doing, but didn't really know we're doing otherwise. And we were, we were young and had energy. I mean, yeah I guess thats, Yeah, I was... 30? We started doing those. Somewhere somewhere around that. And a lot of other people were too. There were a whole bunch of us who were about the same age and a couple we were a bit a little bit older. And it just, it felt nice and creative. And it felt like we're having fun. And we were just still dicking around. Didn't really matter. There were no consequences. It was three quid to come in. Get a shit show? Oh no. So sad. You've drunk two bottles of white lightning. You're fine. It's nice when we had the guy with the parrot they just talked as all the way through.

Richard Minkley 06:04

Please tell me more (please tell me more about the guy with the parrot). I've been waiting for that. Tell me more about the man with the parrot.

06:08

There was always a guy who, just sort of piratey, who used to wander around Nottingham and he just had a parrot on his shoulder all the time. You know proper big like blue, white and red thing. Blue, yellow and red thing. Lovely parrot very friendly. And he came to the shows and the parrot would just effectively Heckle.

Richard Minkley 06:27

I have heard rumors that you were heckled by a parrot.

Nick Tyler 06:29

We've been heckled by parrots. And heckled back. You know.

Richard Minkley 06:33

I need you. I need you to tell me about being heckled by a parrot.

Nick Tyler 06:37

There's not much you can do about it. That's the worst bit. You can't go, "shut up, parrot". Parrots don't listen when you tell them to shut up. They don't care. They're not interested. They're not. They're not. They're not. They're not sentient in the way that they appear to even their language choices.

Richard Minkley 06:48

What did the parrot say?

Nick Tyler 06:49

I think it would repeat stuff. And then we'd just...

Richard Minkley 06:53

It would listen to you?

Nick Tyler 06:54

Apparently, Yeah. It'd just, It would just say mad shit back and. I feel like he also said, like, traditional 'polly wanna a cracker things', but I'm not sure if that's true or just that's just my imagination. It must be in some of the recordings because we have, we have most of those early shows are YouTube. I'm going to have to watch all of those shows for that parrot now. And even if they're not on YouTube, I've probably still got the whole video for most of them. Because we got a video camera quite early when we were at the Art Org for this stuff.

Richard Minkley 07:20

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 07:20

It's only the first, the first, maybe six months didn't have them, but after that we got, we bought curtains and lights and installed those in the space. Well, we installed the lights, we had to put the curtains up every fucking month. That was a nightmare on a 18 foot ladder, trying to hang curtains and then take them down at the end of the night as well as assembling the stage. That was probably the ultimate death knell for it, but even that felt like part of the community. You'd turn up two hours in advance, you'd build the stage, you put the curtains up, you get the light set up, swear at them for changing the light settings. Oh my god, they fucked those things so much. And we try and make those work. James Dalby would be constantly trying to fix them. Just trying and make them work and arrange them.

Richard Minkley 08:00

Was James Dalby there?

Nick Tyler 08:01

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 08:02

Oh man.

Nick Tyler 08:03

James Dalby was on stage was our regular tech dude at Glee as well.

Richard Minkley 08:09

Yeah?

Nick Tyler 08:09

He mixed our, the music, the intro music that we came into every time it Glee which is a banging little tune and I love it. Yeah, James is ace and did a whole bunch of nice things for us with that.

Richard Minkley 08:23

So that's what your shows were like, what were the jams like? Were they still called jams at this point?

Nick Tyler 08:31

Yeah, they were still jams. They didn't, I don't think we call them drop-ins until we got to the Malt Cross.

Richard Minkley 08:35

Yeah?

Nick Tyler 08:36

And yeah. Yeah, they were still jams. They were still a lot of fun. And that must be when we got the first of our, like guest teachers in, coming along. At the Art Org? Yeah. So. Who found Who? So we had a nice man called Klaus Peter Schreiner. German fellow. Who came over and ran a couple of drop ins and then ran a slightly longer like mini course on Monday evenings for a while. He was a very nice guy. He specialized in a very slow form of improv, thats slowly built so it doesn't appeal to me because it, I like the immediate energy and the "fuck it, explode, go" feel of improv. That's what i want from improv. I don't, I don't really care for the slow burn stuff. But he was he was really good because he showed us some more structure to how you think about running a drop in or running a jam and thinking about what the wants are. What were these things aimed at? What are they doing? what you're trying to achieve? We also had one of Justin's friends from New Zealand. His name escapes me. A human who I think everyone hated but.

Richard Minkley 09:50

Vicious.

Nick Tyler 09:53

Maybe it wasn't him.

Richard Minkley 09:54

Was this Kiwi Jiff?

Nick Tyler 09:57

No, this wasn't Kiwi Jiff. We'll get to Kiwi Jiff. No, no, this chap came in and just assume that no one knew anything, I think. And so it was.

Richard Minkley 10:06

Oh, was this a teacher?

Nick Tyler 10:07

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 10:08

Oh okay.

Nick Tyler 10:08

It was just really oddly dismissive. We only had him for like one night. But it's it was like, "mmmr mmmr mmmr, you know what you're doing?" I think we've even got pictures of that. There's photos of...

Richard Minkley 10:17

Just everyone being angry.

Nick Tyler 10:18

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 10:19

no. Sorry, time.

Nick Tyler 10:21

You're allowing me to wander aren't you, which is dangerous.

Richard Minkley 10:23

No, I'm taking the piss, which is not what I should be doing in a history recording. Because when you write this down, it's like, "no, they actually meant that".

Nick Tyler 10:33

But the feeling was lovely. There was certainly more people, more people coming regularly. Certainly... This is where I've got like my weird attendance records. Because I used to I used to tick people in, so we knew they were there. There certainly by 2011, we had like the full group we had like Martin, Dahveed, David Tues, David Flynn. James Dolby was there, Jeff was back. And Nick Park house, Parky. We had Brendan. Not not Brendon Duffy.

Richard Minkley 11:04

Not Brendon that I know?

Nick Tyler 11:05

No. He's a fucking genius of a man, Brendan, who's now in Liverpool doing art stuff. Wonder what his surname is. Dunno, it's gone. Rupes was here by this point.

Richard Minkley 11:15

Rupes was in quiet early on.

Nick Tyler 11:16

Rupes, Rupes was there early. Rupes must have been there for 20... 2010 onwards. Rupes is, other than me, I think is our longest lasting, like, regular drop-in attendee.

Richard Minkley 11:27

That's incredible because I recently taught him on his first level one.

Nick Tyler 11:34

But then we never had level courses.

Richard Minkley 11:36

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 11:36

You know, we didn't have level courses until we moved to the corner. Which is later,

Richard Minkley 11:43

Well...

Nick Tyler 11:43

... in time? Few years after that maybe 2014?

Richard Minkley 11:47

How did that continue then because we got a pattern of you, you're still doing short form drop ins you still doing, you started doing shows the Arts Org.

Nick Tyler 11:58

Yeah. And that's that's what...

Richard Minkley 11:59

Do you have an idea of how long that lasts, that went on for, until something changed?

Nick Tyler 12:03

I'll have, I'll have the show list somewhere with dates for that stuff. Because I've got, I've got show dates for the Art Org and Glee shows somewhere in a spreadsheet.

Richard Minkley 12:11

I downloaded them off of the thing as well.

Nick Tyler 12:14

Oh cool.

Richard Minkley 12:14

I've got, but ,I'm just trying to get your sense of like, Yeah. Do you remember when things change?

Nick Tyler 12:20

Yeah. So so some some stuff changed when? And it was when we got different people. So when when I think, I feel Martin and Daveed arrived at the same time, Daveed had been doing improv in France with his, with the team he was, at the university he was working at, I think. And he'd done improv back in Canada. So he came with a host of additional knowledge and information about, about how improv is done. I think they were doing a lot of short form too. And that helped, because we started to get people who've done it in some kind of semi formal setting. Martin had done a lot of drama at A level. Maybe a bit after that as well, I can't remember. As you know, consummate beautiful performer. Detail and sensitive, all of these things. A joy to perform with. And his his want to do stuff shifted it a little bit. And then

Richard Minkley 13:17

So there was a... Is there a kind of sense that with these new members you, because you described it as there being like a hunger, well, I'm paraphrasing, the people who were coming up wanted to do shows.

Nick Tyler 13:29

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 13:29

Did they also want to do other stuff than the short form you were doing?

Nick Tyler 13:33

No, not, that didn't come til later, because no one no one knew that existed, really.

Richard Minkley 13:39

okay.

Nick Tyler 13:39

We had a vague sense and we started doing it because by that point, we started doing, sort of narrative guided games where... So it was less than than a game but more like you tell a story. Like, you know, typewriter type things where you, you tell about the story, "and then this happened" and then you see what happened. So we're doing, we're doing narrative stuff.

Richard Minkley 13:57

Just to pinpoint on that then because it sounds a little bit like I've seen in the Star Wars shows. Where you like when you have the Death Star scene. So you'd have someone, the two guys on the Death Star, then you cut to the thing, and then you come back and you'd have more with the death star.

Nick Tyler 14:12

Yeah, there's certainly a bit of that. That's a bit of, a bit of that. I mean, there are other shortish, short-medium form games, I guess, where you do have a narrator to show everyone whats happening and then you see the stuff in between, they join it all up. We we're certainly doing that kind of stuff.

Richard Minkley 14:24

So, what, yeah, I'm really interested. What was that short form? What was that format of long form that you were just describing with the typewriter?

Nick Tyler 14:30

Typewriter? So, you have someone who is telling their story, so, they, you will, I guess you'll narrate a bit of the story. You'll set it up, essentially, you set the scene up.

Richard Minkley 14:41

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 14:41

And you know, and, "A tall mountain. Many people in it. Everyone was dead, but then there are houses and then then there's a forest and it's a very sad time. It's the 18th century", whatever. Whatever setup you're doing. And then two people come in, and you might give them some, you might give them a character note or some kind of note and then they will play out that scene however it plays out. And when that scene comes to an end, you then, or you can end the scene by picking up that story. "And so as the blood soaked into the floorboards", you know, you move the scene on somewhere else. So you didn't see that as what we would now conventionally call long-form. The terms, at least short form didn't exist as a term. We weren't using any of those terms. They were just they were, if anything, there was theater sports games, because that's what Jeff had seen done at loose moose. Theatre Sports is a Keith Johnston, I believe it's even a copyrighted term, which is the wankiest fucking thing.

Richard Minkley 15:36

Maybe, maybe.

Nick Tyler 15:37

Theatre Sports, which is, which is done by, there's a theater sports group up in Liverpool? Manchester? And they do this branded, short form show, which is, which is these these games in this, way of competing that somehow Johnstone managed to copyright. I don't understand. And so we call them games, you know, they were theatre games.

Richard Minkley 16:01

That's interesting.

Nick Tyler 16:01

So the term long form I don't think we really noticed until Lloydie got very involved and interested and went and did his first 101 in New York at UCB. And came back buzzing with ideas.

Richard Minkley 16:14

Do you remember when he came back?

Nick Tyler 16:17

Yeah, he came back very, very excited and wanting to teach, you know, the sort of stuff that he'd been doing. And so it made sense, some of it didn't. It's clear that some of it hadn't gelled in his own head, either. You trying to, "you just do this thing. And like, you know, erm, erm", because what's the, what's the UCB thing? Oh, you know, "find the funny, find the funny". Great. Saying a phrase over and over doesn't make it mean any more. Just doesn't. I had this, I found the same saying with, when we saw

Jason Colleen much later. You know, like, "Own it, own it!", "Yeah, that's not a phrase that has any currency here." Again, shouting over and over doesn't didn't give me any more detail about what you actually want me to do.

Richard Minkley 16:52

I've seen that from other people who go into a course come back and they're like, "Yeah, do the thing. It's amazing." And we're like "we haven't spent six hours doing this. We don't understand what you're talking about."

Nick Tyler 17:03

Yeah, and it, that took a long time to make sense. But we were already doing, you know, what we now call open scenes. Yeah? Yeah because there'd been clear need. Its like, "well, we're playing these games. Why don't you just play them without the rules?"

Richard Minkley 17:14

Did that come from when Jeff went to Loose Goose?, Loose goose. Loose Moose?

Nick Tyler 17:19

Loose Mahoosegoose.

Richard Minkley 17:20

Loosey Goosey Moosey.

Nick Tyler 17:22

Don't know when that came out. I think I just emerged, maybe David had been doing them, in France. I don't know. But they just emerged as another thing that we did alongside the games. So eventually, in our shows. I must have some of the show plans around somewhere. we'd end up alternating, you know; game, open scene, game, open scene. Because the games are a surefire win in theory. You know, you've got a structure that is difficult, therefore appealing to an audience. It has built in gags effectively in the structure. So it's a win win. Either it's really hard the audience finds it funny that you failed, or, or it works, it's funny and you win. Whereas the open scenes were the riskier ones because they had no rules. And this was before we had any real sense beyond 'yes, and' and detail, as like nebulous things that we throw in. We probably got more rigorous about that when Lloydie came back with more, like, with with more, more theory. More theory that someone else had worked on rather than what we'd discovered for ourselves. Sort of had that added back in and that was interesting.

Richard Minkley 18:23

I was gonna say how did you take to that because you

Nick Tyler 18:26

More stuff, cool.

Richard Minkley 18:27

Yeah?

Nick Tyler 18:28

Sure.

Richard Minkley 18:30

Okay.

Nick Tyler 18:31

Yeah, it's more stuff. You know.

Richard Minkley 18:33

Because you described yourself as really, like, you enjoy the short form, that kind of 'get to it' kind of energy.

Nick Tyler 18:39

I do, but you can do that with...

Richard Minkley 18:40

Long form has an association with being slower

Nick Tyler 18:42

It does. Its associated being endlessly tedious, wildly pretentious and maintains a standard that nothing else reaches, which is laughable. Much like...

Richard Minkley 18:51

Not in a good way though.

Nick Tyler 18:52

No, no. The excessive reverence for the Harold, you know, which I saw I came back with Lloydie. Its like, yeah, this is the thing that we're, all improv's aiming for. Which is certainly true in some theaters, but it's not. I've seen many terrible Harold's. Ones, especially the ones that you see on YouTube, which like, these are the worst examples you could ever show a person of 'Why this could be good?'. Like this is dire. I think some of the UCB ones that are on there that we got, saw as like examples. "Look at this is Tina Fey in it.", "This is awful. This is awful, unfunny and unappealing. Find me a better example."

Richard Minkley 19:27

Is that the, is that Asssscat?

Nick Tyler 19:28

Asssscat, Yeah. Excruciating thing to watch. Just awful. And It's amazing. Because obviously they're wildly renowned "Oh my god, these guys are amazing." But when you see somebody go, "oh my god, they're amazing", and like, "watch them do this". You know, "well, that's awful. Kind of doubting whether or not anything they do is very good." Obviously do many good things. But it's, it's one of the horrors improv, that, you're gonna bring up, "here's a good concrete example, this thing on YouTube, for a thing that you really had to be there. And now you're not there. And it's just some guy rooting around in a mime truck?" "Cool. Let's do that". But it certainly inspired people like Steve to want to do Custard Riff and other things. And we did do more and more open scenes and...

Richard Minkley 20:14

Have we reached custard riff?

Nick Tyler 20:15

Maybe. Probably not really no. We probably haven't done the first year of shows at the Art Org. They did all kinds of [good stuff]. We did a torture show. We did an elimination show.

Richard Minkley 20:26

I'll pick up on that, because it seems that, that seems to be a function of the way that you guys are planning it, because you'd have a meeting.

Nick Tyler 20:33

Yeah, yeah.

Richard Minkley 20:34

And you would decide what the show was.

Nick Tyler 20:36

Yeah, and...

Richard Minkley 20:36

And that was a different show every time.

Nick Tyler 20:38

Yeah, and the show would have different themes. So I can't remember. I mean, I can't remember the order them but, you know, we'd try and do something, not, not topical but at least have a theme that fit in. So we had an improv scorcher in one summer. We all wore, you know, Hawaiian shirts. If I recall correctly, me Martin and Jeff all bought the same Hawaiian shirt, which was delightful. The same one from Primark because why would you have a Hawaiian shirt.

Richard Minkley 21:00

Yeah. So what came first; the Glee Club or gorilla burger?

Nick Tyler 21:08

Oh Glee. Gorilla burgers way later.

Richard Minkley 21:11

Okay, so when did Glee happen? Like, not as what month, date?

Nick Tyler 21:20

Sure. So.

Richard Minkley 21:21

You're at the Art Org.

Nick Tyler 21:22

we're probably at the art, we must be in the Art Org for maybe 18 months. And then, it was, it was related to Helen setting up the comedy fest. Because Helen said, of course used to come to Missimp and was at all the jams and stuff, and was heavily involved. Was even on stage a couple of times. hated singing even then. Along with.

Richard Minkley 21:42

Hated singing?

Nick Tyler 21:43

Yeah, Hellen hates singing, strong. And a couple of her friends used to come to a lot of shows, some of the drop-ins, Flick and Rachel, I'll say? Pretty sure at one of the shows, Flick herself in the toilet, down in some way. Complicated. People are strange.

Richard Minkley 22:01

Flick?

Nick Tyler 22:02

Flick

Richard Minkley 22:03

Who's Flick?

Nick Tyler 22:03

She's one of, one of Helens friends.

Richard Minkley 22:05

Full Name?

Nick Tyler 22:06

No clue.

Richard Minkley 22:07

Okay, fair enough. We'll keep going.

Nick Tyler 22:09

No.

Richard Minkley 22:09

But Helen was one of the people. Did Helen come to the drop-in's.

Nick Tyler 22:13

Yeah yeah yeah yeah, she, very very much in, very much in with the, in with the jams.

Richard Minkley 22:17

And then she set up the comedy festival.

Nick Tyler 22:18

Yeah. And as she was doing that she was, well, she and Elliott, of course. Elliott was heavily involved in that stuff. And because she was talking to lots of people, she got talking to the guy setting up the Glee Club, because. Before it was the Glee Club on Castle Wharf, it used to be Jongleurs. Yeah, a well.

Richard Minkley 22:37

The same building?

Nick Tyler 22:38

Yeah. A renowned shithole. And vendor of awful comedy, drunk people and a disco afterwards. Then Jongleurs moved up into town. It's obviously, Just The Tonic was around, but Jongleurs closed down. I don't know if it reopened immediately. But Mark Tughan, who's the guy who runs the Glee Club, bought that expanding from his base in Oxford and Birmingham, I don't remember where else, with the intent to make this like, this is the big new thing. And Hellen was talking to him from early on and arranged a meeting. So I met with Mark in... What's that pub that's got a long name on Canal Street.

Richard Minkley 23:20

Oh, The Olde Trip To Jerusalem.

Nick Tyler 23:21

No, no, not, not that far a long.

Richard Minkley 23:23

Wait. Which ones Canal Street?

Nick Tyler 23:24

Canal Street. Canal Street is on the leads all the way around to that. But nearer to the station. Feel like its got a long name. Probably doesn't. There are a couple of pubs there.

Richard Minkley 23:33

Is it The Canal House?

Nick Tyler 23:35

Ha ha ha. No. Fuck you. No, it's a couple, couple more further up toward the station than that. I could find out. It doesn't matter. It's tangential detail. But we met in a pub.

Richard Minkley 23:46

Okay.

Nick Tyler 23:46

We had a drink.

Richard Minkley 23:47

Do you remember anything about that meeting?

Nick Tyler 23:48

Yeah, we had a nice chat about, you know, partly about what Mark wanted from the Glee Club which he wanted, he wanted to be able to support local acts and local community stuff. He was interested and excited by that idea. I explain what we were doing, you know, we're pulling in 70 to 90 people at the end of the month for our shows at the Art Org. Three quid a pop, that was pretty good. I mean, it felt like a lot that went well because there wasn't much other comedy going on, really. Wasn't much stand up. You know, just the tonic was running. And Jongleurs had just died, I think.

Richard Minkley 24:19

What was just the tonic? Is that a local thing, or is that.

Nick Tyler 24:22

Yeah, yeah. Just the tonic's, originally, local thing set up by Daryl Martin, for whom Spiky Mike was promoter for a long time before going off to do, whatever it is that Spikey does these days. Yeah, and Darryl. It's [...] its infamous club. Just The Tonic had huge names. Johnny Vegas' a regular patron amongst other people. Not sure I've ever been to a Just The Tonic show. Maybe once because they're up, round the other side of the courthouse now, aren't they. I think I think that's where they're still based. I don't, I don't see much of it.

Richard Minkley 24:49

Of course, yeah.

Nick Tyler 24:56

But yeah, they've, He's also got clubs in London and stuff now.

Richard Minkley 24:59

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 24:59

Big theatre down there.

Richard Minkley 25:00

Okay, so, go back to that meeting. What did... So, you agreed to do the show?

Nick Tyler 25:08

Yeah yeah yeah. Mark was keen for a community show. We're like, "Well, we're amateurs. You know, we're just fucking about, but we do this show. It's kind of fun, people came, seem to dig it, we'd be interested something else. You know, because they we're talking about they're having two spaces at Glee. A huge auditorium space upstairs and a much smaller more intimate venue, more, I can't remember what that is, 70 seats or something like that. And we were like, "Yeah, that sounds like a lot of fun. We don't know anything about promoting a show". Because we'd never done it. You know, we used to print, I used to make the little flyer in CorelDRAW. The version was on my ancient PC.

Richard Minkley 25:45

CorelDRAW.

Nick Tyler 25:46

CorelDRAW. I know. You know Corel is still going?

Richard Minkley 25:48

No.

Nick Tyler 25:48

Yeah, Corel still exists. They're still bringing out new products. There's a umm, not kickstarter.

Richard Minkley 25:54

No, we're not going into the history of Corel.

Nick Tyler 25:55

There was a humble bundle, were could buy all that stuff for like \$5 last month.

Richard Minkley 25:58

Wow.

Nick Tyler 25:59

I didn't. Because I use Photoshop now. Because it's better. But yeah, I used to all the posters in that, on this computer that would take hours to render a picture and then eventually like, paint.net and stuff. And then I print them off and photocopy them at work, at Probation. Do like 1000 A6 flights in color. "What are you doing in there?", "I'm photocopying probation audit forms". [mmmmmmmm, chu-chung] These giant wedges of like crudely hacked up A6 flyers. That was the extent of the promo that we did. Used to litter, litter the town with those. They were cute and fun. So maybe some bigger posters known again. Yeah, that was the limit of what we've done.

Richard Minkley 26:40

Do you remember your first Glee show?

Nick Tyler 26:42

I remember the soft opening because, we did was they did a soft opening as like "teaser of things to come". Which was huge. They fucking rammed the place. So me Marilyn, Lloydie, maybe Martin, maybe David, can't remember. Got the video somewhere. We did, We did, We did the soft, We did the soft opening. To introduce us, "this is Missimp, they're going to be doing a show here every month". I think it was original Wednesdays. Wednesday mid month show, which proved not to be helpful in lots of ways. But yeah, that absolutely packed the space. The massive auditorium upstairs. So like 5/600 people in there. It was crazy. It was all free entry because it was, you know, promo thing. All free food. They'd had some stand ups on. We were up in the green room chatting away with people, you know, "what do you do?", "We", i'm a stand up comedian, "Well, we're just making some shit up in a minute". "We're about to plan what we're going to do. It'll be fine". And what I do remember is they'd been, we'd been watching in the back and they'd been, these girls bitching all the way through that they hadn't had their food yet. And they're doing these big fish finger sandwiches and stuff. It was great. Wede had some upstairs. They hadn't [sad muh muh muh noise]. But we were all kind of nervous, you know. This is certainly the biggest audience I'd ever been in front of. I don't think any of the others had been in front of audiences that size either.

Richard Minkley 27:22

Wow. Wow.

Nick Tyler 27:23

I say no, no Missimp show had ever been in front of that many people. Yeah, it was pubs and bars. You know, though we might have had 90 people at the Art Org. That always felt like carnage. And there might have been a caravan parked in a bit of the room that we had to act around. I shit you not?

Richard Minkley 28:21

Did that happen?

Nick Tyler 28:21

Yeah, yeah, yeah. They used to regularly forget that we were going to be on at the Art Org. So they have moved things into the space.

Richard Minkley 28:27

A caravan?

Nick Tyler 28:27

Yeah, there was a Caravan they were using as part of like a shop. And like we were, "Can we move this?", "No". So I. So it's like halfway, halfway down the room. It was like leaning halfway over the stage. So we had to build, shape the audience around it. Many. we're used to dealing with obstructions as what I'm saying and complications.

Richard Minkley 28:43

You've literally parked a caravan both in the, in the Arts Org and in the middle of your story the first time at the Glee Club.

Nick Tyler 28:49

That's true, yes. I'm sorry. So.

Richard Minkley 28:51

Do you remember being on stage at the Glee Club? On that opening night?

Nick Tyler 28:54

Yeah, yeah. It was, It was great. We were very nervous. Came on shouting. I suspect i was wearing one of my, a blue t shirt. I was quite happily yelling. I don't think we are miked either, because we've always been pretty loud. Say that, that quartet. And the audience fucking loved what we were doing.

Richard Minkley 28:55

Yeah?

Nick Tyler 29:04

We weren't doing anything complicated. We're playing like, 'round the world in really bad accents and stuff. Maybe an alphabet game, nothing to compare. There was no room, it was on a tiny stage. But I think my favorite thing is we got heckled by these women who were hungry. They just went, "I still haven't had my [...] food". I was like, "Oh, no, that's terrible. Oh". You know, just to encourage her to talk. It was like, "Yeah, my friends, my friends, needs to eat. She's diabetic". I was like, "Oh, no. Oh, what kind of diabetes?". Went, "type 2", "what, the fat kind?". And that shut them up entirely. And we were able to get on the rest of the set.

Richard Minkley 29:48

Vicious.

Nick Tyler 29:50

I had to do a lot of putting down of heckling at the Art Org and at Glee.

Richard Minkley 29:54

Really?

Nick Tyler 29:55

In the early days. Certainly the early days of the Art Org, yeah, there's quite a lot of that. Because people will turn up for three quid and it's like, "Whay! We're gonna yell and we're gonna talk and stuff". So yeah, we got quite good at yelling at people. I really, I always liked audience interaction on that basis.

Richard Minkley 30:07

What, because you'd be mean to them?

Nick Tyler 30:09

They were being dicks. You can't be mean to someone who's being an asshole. It's fine. It's impossible.

Richard Minkley 30:14

Wow.

Nick Tyler 30:14

But it was really, it was really good and the audience loved our little show at the soft opening. So that when really well. We all, we're all buzzing going off stage for that.

Richard Minkley 30:21

Wow.

Nick Tyler 30:22

That was really cool.

Richard Minkley 30:23

So you started, did that lead to you doing more regular shows at the Glee?

Nick Tyler 30:27

Oh no, that was, that was introduction, because we were going to be on at the Glee Club.

Richard Minkley 30:31

Ah, I see.

Nick Tyler 30:31

Yeah, so that was like "this is one of the things that, your fourth coming attractions". So yeah, then we started doing our monthly Wednesday shows called Missimp In Action, because it sounds like missing in action. Didn't really make any sense.

Richard Minkley 30:33

You're compounding puns there.

Nick Tyler 30:46

Yes. I know. It's Yes. Yes. Because. And obviously by this point we'd contracted our name to Missimp, at some point in the, in the, in the interim. Can't remember when that happened. Missimp, Mission Improbable is a mouthful.

Richard Minkley 30:59

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 30:59

Its a lot to put on a poster.

Richard Minkley 31:03

Often in my head, I imagine, the Arts Org and the Glee Club as two separate periods in time.

Nick Tyler 31:10

No, they overlapped. They certainly overlapped by, least six months. Because we were doing the Wednesday. Because it was Wednesday show, so I didn't replace the end of the month show. They were different things. Or like they felt like they were different things very early on. I think thats, I think that's why they turned out not to be great for us. Because it felt very diff. It felt like a very different vibe. It felt very formal like, "Shit, this needs to be good", in a way that the Art Orgs hows didn't, really. I mean, they did. They needed to be good and we, we tried to make them good. But it was a lot, there were, people were paying a lot more on the door as well for the Glee shows. Its certainly, ooh, at least double. At least double £3.

Richard Minkley 31:52

£6?

Nick Tyler 31:53

Outrageous. I wouldn't pay six quid for comedy show. Fuck that. Not for this bunch of losers.

Richard Minkley 32:01

So.

Nick Tyler 32:03

But, but the thing was that, what Mark wanted and what Glee wanted was for us to bring our audience over.

Richard Minkley 32:08

Right.

Nick Tyler 32:09

We had these 90 people who, or 70 to 90 people who'd come and see an improv show every month. Surely they'd go to see in a different place. That's twice the price, where they pay for drinks that are at least a fiver each. Surely, surely. No. As it turns out, not. We had a lot of fun doing them. And some of them were good, and we set you up some really great moments of them captured and we had a lot of fun doing it. It was... But it was hard work. Wednesday not, Wednesday night shows are a nightmare. As we know from smash night, you know. Smash nights great, but going out on a Wednesday, is exhausting. I say, once, you're like, working. You know, you're gotta go to go to work and think in the morning. That's impossible. And it there's no way you leave a show when you're not buzzing at 10 o'clock in the evening. There's no way you're sleeping after that. But they were, they were good. We had some great people on stage. We had Trilly, Brendan, people doing stuff. Ah, wonderful shows.

Richard Minkley 33:03

So.

Nick Tyler 33:09

but after a while.

Richard Minkley 33:10

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 33:11

Oh that's. And that's why we ended up doing, that's why we lost the Art Org. We lost the Art Org shows because

Richard Minkley 33:16

So, you lost the Art Org is...

Nick Tyler 33:16

The Art Org was change. Yeah because the art. We lost we lost the whole of the Art Org eventually. Initially we lost the ground floor because Liam was transitioning it into the Hopkinson gallery where they'd sell tat that they'd found in car boot sales. You know it's true, Liam. That's exactly what he does. And some of it, some of it's awful. Some of it's amazing. And people can't discriminate anyway, which is why shops work. So.

Richard Minkley 33:19

Just throw that in there.

Nick Tyler 33:40

So they filled up the ground floor with that stuff. Though we've already skipped the 24 hour improv show.

Richard Minkley 33:50

Oh my days.

Nick Tyler 33:51

Which i realise we'll have to come back to in a moment. And lots of other things, I think. But yeah, they, they took the ground floor away as... was it the other way round... No, used the first floor first, got filled up with workshop space and stuff. So we we're using the downstairs for our drop-ins, our jams, and for shows and then eventually that went away too. Because the whole space got taken over. And that's, I think that's when we started doing the end of the month Friday shows at Glee, instead of the Wednesday, maybe Wednesday, mid month. Because we needed a new venue and we couldn't do them.

Richard Minkley 34:23

What was it like using the Art Org?

Nick Tyler 34:24

Oh, it was awful. It was really horrible. That was, that was like being kicked out of your home. I think we were literally kicked out as well because, I don't sure where, where the fuck did we go? Oh, I do know. But, but, yeah, then we move [to doing] the monthly show at Glee. And that was all right for a

while, but then he started, because they couldn't fill, the big auditorium space of their stand ups. But they could feel the lower space. So they filled that with their stand ups, and they moved us upstairs. But we were most getting 40 people in. And it was just horrible in that space. Just grim. Its a massive auditorium space, and even though they'd try and close off the curtains, push everyone to the front.

Richard Minkley 35:05

is the one with the big letter, Glee, on the background?

Nick Tyler 35:07

They both got Glee on the background but, you know, the one upstairs has a bigger Glee on the background. Even bigger-er. And they gave us different stage sizes and shapes. And we, we just couldn't fill it. We just couldn't come close to filling it. And we just weren't finding it to be what we needed either. But we, I think we fell out of love with it and Glee lost interest in promoting us. We were just a free thing that was upstairs.

Richard Minkley 35:33

So while you were doing, you lost the Art Org, you had the Glee Club on a Friday, every, well, once a month. Did you have a space to do drop-ins?

Nick Tyler 35:44

Yeah, we did. I don't, I don't think we ever were ever without a space for more than a couple of weeks. I feel like we bounced back to, the Arts theatre very briefly but not for very long. And after that we moved, we were given by... Oh I'm sorry, wrong. It wasn't Liam Woodgates that was in charge of at the time. Its Liam that took it over. Originally it was Rob, who has a surname. Who's.

Richard Minkley 36:11

Rob Howie Smith.

Nick Tyler 36:12

Yeah, Rob Howie Smith. I've just not seen his name written down for a while. Yeah, yeah, and Rob's amazing because hes sorted out so many spaces over the years, around Nottingham. And he'd set up Hopkinsons and then gave, like, handed it over to Liam, to do what he wanted with. Which obviously was a death knell for us. But they were also developing the building immediately next door, theres like a hairdresser downstairs, and there was a, a room. A blue room. The Blue Room, which other people may mention.

Richard Minkley 36:42

Yeah, someone's mentioned the Blue Room.

Nick Tyler 36:43

The blue Room.

Richard Minkley 36:43

Tell me about the Blue Room

Nick Tyler 36:44

It was painted blue. Not just blue, but like a dark, almost it feels like it was Navy blue. It wasn't. It was much more, sort of, dark, muddy, royal blue. And the walls were blue and the ceiling was blue. And

the floorboards were blue. There was the hole in the floor. But also more critically, it was no larger than this room that we're in.

Richard Minkley 37:04

Oh wow.

Nick Tyler 37:05

Possibly a bit smaller. It was the only space we could get at the time, and i can't remember what we paid for it in rent a month. I don't know, several hundred quid that we covered but. Light bled away in that room to darkness. It didn't matter what light you put on in there, it just disappeared. It just went. And we did some fun stuff in there. I think that might of been where, where Klaus was teaching drop-in', was teaching in there.

Richard Minkley 37:30

Whose Klaus, what was his name?

Nick Tyler 37:31

Klaus. Klaus Peter Shriner.

Richard Minkley 37:32

Klaus Peter Shriner.

Nick Tyler 37:34

Do you want, do you want wrote his name down. Nice guy. Still friends on Facebook, I think.

Richard Minkley 37:38

I won't, well, I probably should, but I won't. Did you say that he was one of the teachers who came in or was he just a regular?

Nick Tyler 37:46

No, teacher that came in. He was over from, came in from Germany twice, i want to say.

Richard Minkley 37:51

Okay.

Nick Tyler 37:52

Jeff must have been the connection for that. As I say, I didn't know him before that. Lovely guy. Like him a lot. Yeah, the Blue Room was grim. Because a must of been winter when were were there as well. Fucking freezing. I wonder if the pirate jams are actually recorded there? Not sure. We did some stuff there. I remember, I certainly remember doing musical stuff in there, or trying to do little musical stuff in there. And doing scenes with David where we just couldn't stop laughing. You know, I've not had that for a long time actually in improv, but that type of corpsing where you just can't stop laughing.

Richard Minkley 38:29

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 38:31

Ah, its agony. Sweet agony. I kind of miss that. Not had that for a while. Don't know why in particular but that was just wonderful. I think a part of that was doing stuff with David, with whom I found it incredibly swift and intense bond for improv and other stuff.

Richard Minkley 38:49

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 38:50

In life generally. And it was really nice. Yeah, we had a real, really nice vibe. Very, very energetic and very stupid. I can't know what it was laughing about. Possibly spit roasting bears in the forest. But in a song

Richard Minkley 39:05

In a song?

Nick Tyler 39:06

Hes trying to sing that. "I can't keep saying now. I'm laughing. Can't breath". I think we had a couple of goes at that. what I'm trying to figure out is if that's, as if, at the same time. This is the same time we must have got Heather and Joe up, from the Mayday's at a similar sort of time.

Richard Minkley 39:24

Oh yeah.

Nick Tyler 39:26

Because they came up. Thats when we were borrowing space at the, the Nottingham University rooms, where we did the first Heather and Joe workshop. In their studio space underneath the Trent building.

Richard Minkley 39:42

Oh, really?

Nick Tyler 39:43

Yeah, which was really cool. That was a interesting weekend. Yeah, sorry, we're skipping around again. aren't we. Because most things, I cant remember when things happen.

Richard Minkley 39:52

It feels like there's a lot of skipping about between there in the corner. there, well, even there. We are running out of time a little bit. But I'm aware that one of the things we haven't talked about is the Glee.

Nick Tyler 39:56

There's more stuff before the corner, as well. Other things happen before the corner. We got two other venues before we got there. Okay.

Richard Minkley 40:09

Or the end of the Glee, which I'm interested in.

Nick Tyler 40:11

The demise of the Glee. Well, okay. Well, let's talk about that then.

Richard Minkley 40:14

Well, I.

Nick Tyler 40:15

Well, let's talk about that.

Richard Minkley 40:16

I will, I'm forever grateful to whatever God in the universe decided that things went wrong in a building that was literally called the Glee Club. I'm like, this is brilliant.

Nick Tyler 40:26

Well, you know, Mark took, Paramount or CBS or whoever it is who owns Glee. You know, the TV show to court. Copyright.

Richard Minkley 40:33

Really.

Nick Tyler 40:34

Copyright infringement. And won.

Richard Minkley 40:36

What! Are you kidding me?

Nick Tyler 40:38

No, no, no, look it up. No, he won his, he won his trademark court case and got reparations and they had stopped using the Glee Club as an, as a description for the show. It took, it took years.

Richard Minkley 40:52

Wow.

Nick Tyler 40:53

And I still think it's incredibly frivolous suit. But you know, he was so, I mean, cool of him.

Richard Minkley 40:58

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 40:58

But yeah, so he made, he certainly maintained that the existence of the show, the show Glee, negatively affected their sales and marketing because we thought it was something else.

Richard Minkley 41:10

Anyway.

Nick Tyler 41:10

It was a bunch of teenagers singing. It wasn't. A bunch of older people, crying.

Richard Minkley 41:14

So, when did things. how did things progress in the Glee Club?

Nick Tyler 41:18

So I feel like our first year was pretty good. And then there was both a lot of pressure to put the show on. In a way that we didn't feel that pressure for the, at the Art Org. Partly because it's a proper venue, you know, we've got a semi, semi official agreement contract to do this thing. Which must be when we got a bank account as well so that money can be paid into it. Yeah, that must be why we got a bank account to begin with. So that Glee could pay us.

Richard Minkley 41:51

Wow.

Nick Tyler 41:52

Yeah, cus.

Richard Minkley 41:52

So, you were paid by the Glee Club?

Nick Tyler 41:53

Well, we got ticket, we got box office.

Richard Minkley 41:55

So you got like a slice.

Nick Tyler 41:57

I think we got all the box office for a while. Because they were going to get bar money. [We] were going to be a cheap second show on a Friday.

Richard Minkley 42:05

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 42:05

Which, obviously, as their, their fortunes waned or never quite waxed, I'm not sure which it was. Yeah, the way it was, we end up in that big space more and more often. We were less able to fill it, so it felt less good to do. And it felt like we were, It felt like we put ourselves under increasing pressure to put on a quality show, and put on a show with performers who were going to be really good. And that put a lot of strain on the group and the organizing group, such that it was. And I guess, by that point, i wonder if by that point, that started to be me, Lloydie and Parky as that sort of, kind of, triumvirate, organizing stuff and arranging things. Taking it in turns to run jams and drop-ins and stuff, and organize shows, although the Glee shows, a lot of other people would organize and compared as well like David and. David compared as well. I can't remember who else did. I wonder if Martin did a couple of times. Well we passed that around a little bit more. But it just started to feel like more and more hassle. We weren't quite sure what we were doing. And then there were sort of fallouts following the show at the fringe that fell apart. Because that was then, the Lloydie's play at the fringe that, that fell apart after a couple of days.

Richard Minkley 43:12

It was HR...

Nick Tyler 43:14

HR days night, that we replaced with the improv show. Because at that point, [-] fell out with [-] in particular, because [-] was like, "Oh, yeah, the show isn't working" and so it was not supportive of the show, continuing even though they lost an actress. So that was a, lots of bad blood there and that, well that fractured that thing, quite badly.

Richard Minkley 43:33

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 43:33

Its a shame because we'd done quite a lot of stuff with [-] and it was really good. And a fun guy to do stuff with. Also dating a friend of mine, which also very messy. But so be it. This is the incestuous nature of these circles.

Richard Minkley 43:45

As it goes, so it goes.

Nick Tyler 43:47

But we'd started, because we'd started experimenting at Glee and [at tower] just before then, the Art Org, with doing long form stuff in the shows. With custard rift, was the first long form show, and we did some other bits and pieces. Star Destroyer, up at the Arts theatre in their studio space, which was.

Richard Minkley 44:08

What was Star Destroyer?

Nick Tyler 44:09

Yeah, well, Lloydie wrote the first half of a play, which was set in an observatory that ends in a murder. And theres lots of astrology and stuff. I don't remember, I must have, probably a script somewhere. It was fine. But the second half was improvised. So they would have that, whoever was the cast was that. And then Martin, I would come in, in the second half, and we would improvise the rest of it around them. And set up, they would, so everyone who was in the cast would be, remain their characters and then we would come and change the story around them. Basically, effectively came in as investigators, they [wouldn't realise] when we came in as like men-in-black type people. And it all got very complicated, and there were hoaxes and something about computer things. And we were all like dressed Men-in-Black style. We did, we did good work. We had a lot of fun doing that. That's maybe a two night run or something like that. Because we'd done a couple of Lloydie's plays by that point and. HR days night must have been after that, with coming and going before that. I feel like there was another one but kind of what it was. I'm sure he'll remember. But yeah, we'd had a few fractures that point. And i say, a lot of friction between [-] and [-], while we we're doing Glee stuff. I know, there was just a lot of, everyone was at, well, we felt like we had to be interesting quality, and putting on a good show. And that inevitably led us to not put on good shows.

Richard Minkley 45:37

Was the pressure from the venue or from the team or the community?

Nick Tyler 45:39

No, it was, it was, it was from, it was from us, you know, it was all self generated. You know, we needed more people but none of us knew anything about marketing. And Glee weren't promoting us in a partic, in a useful way either. Which is a shame, because we did nice flyers [to] nice badges. We did badges for first time at Glee. Free badges and stuff. That was fun. And we started. I think no one really wants to do them anymore. No one really wants to do the shows. But we didn't have a way to get out of it. So people were just not as enthused or thrilled about it. And the audience is waned, wained and then dwindled. So that made it harder to a go show, especially in a vast space. And we started doing a short form first half a long form second half. Some of which was good and some of it which was not good. And I think ultimately, it wasn't what the audience wanted, because we're, "Come see live, come and see. Come and see a show because it's short form show". And then it became "Well, theres your short form? And then here's a weirder, longer theatrical thing that may or may not make any sense". Because we weren't, we weren't good at them, I don't think. We did some good stuff, but. It all tailed off. And what do we do in the end? Did we say we're going to say? I think we said we're going to stop doing it. Rather than, I don't think we're actually kicked out. I think we had a meeting and sort of agreed [that] this isn't, this isn't working.

Richard Minkley 45:45

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 45:54

So everyone got to step away without, you know, losing face or anything?

Richard Minkley 46:28

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 46:42

But yeah, I, sometimes I think it was the worst thing we did, doing the Glee shows. We did some good stuff, I think I think it did real... real harm to like the esteem of the performing community. The group of us who did perform. And we didn't, we didn't retain an audience. You know. What we initially offered, they were like, "[What if we, well] I don't want to pay fiver for a drink, gonna have to pay two for a tenner. And get hassled by food, in this giant empty cold space". You know it. I think it just sucked in the end. And, I was relieved when we stopped doing them. I think a lot of us were. It was like, "ah, okay, cool. Now you do something else?"

Richard Minkley 47:44

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 47:44

I guess we must have started teaching the first courses during that time as well, maybe. Or maybe just afterwards.

Richard Minkley 47:51

Well, we're coming to the end of this interview. I, I'll probably. I keep saying this to people that we'll have to do more interviews.

Nick Tyler 48:01

I feel like there might need to be a party since we're up to what 2012 or something

Richard Minkley 48:04

yeah. bane of my life. No, it's a joy, it's a privilege. But to round us off. I'm sorry that we're leaving it in a sad place.

Nick Tyler 48:14

No no, leave it in a crying spot. That's good. It's good for cliffhanger. Its like the end of infinity war.

Richard Minkley 48:20

Why? Why did you click your fingers and turn everyone to sand? No.

Nick Tyler 48:28

Well, I just felt half of them had to die.

Richard Minkley 48:30

So looking back over, gosh thats, this is, what, 2012, you were in?

Nick Tyler 48:37

Something like that. Must be something like that.

Richard Minkley 48:39

About 10, 12 years. Why did you keep doing improv? Why did you keep coming back?

Nick Tyler 48:51

I like the people that i doing it with. You know, I've, there's always been, i've always, there's always been a lot of people i've wanted to do it with. And I think Glee ended at the same, Glee. Glee was at the same time, a lot of people that I really loved got less interested in doing it. You know, Carl Jones went off to do much more stand up at that point. Brendon moved away, Trill moved to London. Dahveed started doing other stuff as well. I think that all contributed to the sort of feeling [sad sound]. But ultimately, I still like seeing people on a Thursday day. It's still my main social activity.

Richard Minkley 49:23

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 49:23

And for me, that still mattered more than the rest of it. You know, I like I like being on stage, mostly. Not always, and it's not it's not been the big thing for me for the last couple of years. But I like seeing the people on a Thursday I like, I like the continuous and changing parts of the community.

Richard Minkley 49:44

Yeah,

Nick Tyler 49:44

I like that some people continue. Like that. Love seeing Rupes. I've seen Rupes almost every Thursday for like the last 10 years, maybe longer. You know, more or less. That's great. I like that a lot. The we picked Eddie up probably not [...] like 2014 or something. When we're at the corner, so you know, there's a lot of people that are seen that often.

Richard Minkley 50:07

Its interesting because like there's, there's, and it's something that I always think of with you, is that there seems to be a, you don't have an ambition for improv. There's lots of people who have, this kind of fits into a broader ambition to perform and to make that a thing.

Nick Tyler 50:27

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 50:28

That's been something that I've always seen lacking in you.

Nick Tyler 50:32

It is a failing, you're right.

Richard Minkley 50:33

No, I don't. Its absolutely not a failing. I mean, it's it's, it's an, it's like, it's like. You know, in cop films where they have the incorruptible cop?

Nick Tyler 50:42

Oh, yeah,.

Richard Minkley 50:43

Its like why, why don't you have the the failing of being, wanting to be rich and famous?

Nick Tyler 50:49

You don't know that I've been taking fifty percent of everything we've ever taken and just putting in my back pocket? You know?

Richard Minkley 50:52

Oh, so you are rich.

Nick Tyler 50:53

Yeah yeah yeah, it works really well. No, I've, no, I've never really had any dreams or ambitions, which might sound awful, but I don't I just don't really have them.

Richard Minkley 51:03

Does that.

Nick Tyler 51:04

In life. So not having an improv for me is perfectly normal. No, the bit that, the bit that I want in the end, I think, ultimately, the reason that I've kept doing it, is that I think it's a thing that other people like doing. And that needs to be maintained so that more people get a chance to do it. But should someone with actual dreams or hopes or ambitions show up who actually wants to do it? Please Christ, get on and do it. And I think that's what we have done quite well, is when people have come in said "I'd like to this", I'd say "great". We had Scott Taylor came to us want to do a bunch of sketches. We did sketches microwaving ants, back at the... I enjoy your face so much when I say these things. Yeah, local historian Scott, wrote a great book on lost Nottingham. very good. Also wrote a load of sketches and wanted people to be in sketches and to record some. We did a live sketch show at the Art Org as part one of the early comedy festivals.

Richard Minkley 52:02

Wow.

Nick Tyler 52:04

I hope we still. I don't know if I've got copies of the sketches. I know Scott will. They run a website, for a while. So of them were very, very odd. I certainly did some of the voices. Marilyn did a bunch more. And some of the others did even more. But, but yeah, what. What I want and what I like about it is that people come along, and they do this thing that they enjoy. And if they want to do more with it, we've been able to say yes. Lloydie wanted to start teaching, We said "Yes. Great. Let's start teaching" and a bunch of us did that. He went to set up rhymes so we said "Yes, let's do that. That's great. We'll put thousands of pounds towards setting up rhymes" which we did, in training, room hire, buying a keyboard. We bought a keyboard. All of that money was funneled into that project, and it's been very successful. When other people wanted to set up teams, we said, "Great. Let's do that". And Vox pops you're in. And Emily wants to set up the vortex, "Great. Let's do that". "You want to"

Richard Minkley 52:53

Do an oral history.

Nick Tyler 52:54

Yeah, "Lloydie, do you wanna do some plays? Great. We'll back those. We'll use the 24 hour improv show to raise funds to take one of them to Edinburgh. We'll support all these things". And I think we've, we've done an okay job at trying to support people when they want to do things. And now we have, you know, the new, "newer generation" it sounds hideously patronizing, of.

Richard Minkley 53:07

The kids.

Nick Tyler 53:11

The kids. Aye, does feel like that, I know. Jesus. When we've got people like Thomas, who's like 19. Bless him though, he goes, "Oh, I thought you we're like in your mid 30s". Like, "Yes, you did. Good man. Good man".

Richard Minkley 53:24

I'm not even gonna ask.

Nick Tyler 53:25

I'm 41. 42 this year. Because i'd, because I'd have to be, for this chronology to make sense.

Richard Minkley 53:34

No, I'm getting distracted. So just as a final question, you've, I'm interested in that. Is it a sense of responsibility that you need to look after this thing for other people, or is it that you like looking after it for other people, like giving them the opportunities?

Nick Tyler 53:52

I think there's a weird complicated bit of both of that. I think there's, there can be a nice thing about going, you know, "oh yeah, I help this thing to exist. And so that you can do these things". But I think increasingly that doesn't really matter to me. I don't, I don't want to be in charge. I've never sought to

be in charge. It's been left with me and I've... If you leave me to organize something, I'll organize something. Might not be what you wanted, but the thing will be organized. But other people are much better at that. And so they should be able to do it, and able to do it. I see myself much more as a caretaker for this, this, the point I think we're at now. Where I can probably step back.

Richard Minkley 54:31

Yeah?

Nick Tyler 54:32

From organizing it entirely. Yeah, I hope so. I think, I think like, that's surely the end game of becoming a CIC. This is, this is now a proper organization, with other people who have also committed to it and that we've now got a formal way of getting other people to commit to it. So you want to be a director, great, you sign up, and that means you got to do this shit for, until you, until you don't. So I see this both as a way for Missimp to persist and for me to get out.

Richard Minkley 55:00

That is a very [...] to end on. By the way, i'm going to skip to the end, I'm bailing. bye. Thank you so much for your time.

Nick Tyler 55:08

Nah, you're welcome, man.

4.2. Interview 2 of 2

a) Part 1 of 2

23rd March 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Glee Club end, Art Org end, community impact, new venue, musical improv, Edinburgh Fringe, pub poetry, pirate stories, venue challenges, teaching improv, leadership dynamics, annual awards, virtual pub, improv courses, community growth

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Nick Tyler

Nick Tyler 00:00

And recording there. Right.

Richard Minkley 00:01

So it is Tuesday, the 23rd of March, 2021 at five past six in the evening. My name is Richard Minkley, and I'm interviewing Nick Tyler for the Missimp oral history pod [...] I don't know. It's the oral history.

Nick Tyler 00:17

Slick.

Richard Minkley 00:17

There you go. I am.

Nick Tyler 00:20

I'm waving for no reason.

Richard Minkley 00:21

Yeah. Don't worry, the people at home will really appreciate the wafting sounds. Right, So, as we were talking about a little bit before. We left off, our last interview, kind of in a sad note. The Glee had come to an end, the kind of residency at the art org had come to an end. The first question is, do you remember what the community was like in the aftermath of both of those two events?

Nick Tyler 00:48

I'm trying to think when it was so there was, that's what end of 20... beginning of 2015 is that right? Must be the end of 2015 something like that, or end of 2014 I think that was the end of like Missimp, wasn't it. Missimp in action. I think that's right, Jesus, which is endlessly confusing.

Richard Minkley 01:08

Do you remember where you were performing after that. or where you were sort of doing drop ins and things after that space?

Nick Tyler 01:14

Oh. The two things overlap. This is why I have my list, because I know it's confusing.

Richard Minkley 01:21

okay.

Nick Tyler 01:23

because Glee Club and the art org didn't end at the same time. They, they overlap for a while. So

Richard Minkley 01:33

for the sake of the recording, Nick has a calendar or some sort of timeline up in front of him, and he's making...

Nick Tyler 01:39

Timeline's a really strong word.

Richard Minkley 01:43

He's got some sort of time wobble,

Nick Tyler 01:47

yeah. So. What I do know is that, yeah, MissImp at the Art organization ended, and we, we had to find a new venue, because they changed, and they wanted... It began Hopkinson Gallery, which is full of, like, wonderful tat,

Richard Minkley 02:02

yeah.

Nick Tyler 02:03

Which you can go and buy if you want to buy tat and plastic things and glass things and wood things. So for a while, we felt properly homeless when that happened. That was that was really like the sort of rug being ripped out from underneath us, even though it was a rug that we'd been warned was being removed. And we looked down and watched the rug being pulled and went "no-oo-oo". And we failed to properly formulate any real plans for that. So we moved initially, all of us that there were at the time, because quite a lot of us at that point. I don't know, maybe 20 or 30 people would see regularly coming into drop ins and stuff, improv jams they were back then,

Richard Minkley 02:40

Did it feel quite big, the community. I was going to say the amount of the community, but.

Nick Tyler 02:45

the quantity of community? Yeah, it did. yeah. Because, yeah, we've done a whole bunch of things by that point. You know, we've done, we've done quite a lot of short form. We'd started getting into long form. We've done a couple of Nottingham comedy festivals. We've done some sketch stuff with Scott Taylor at microwaving ants. And which was pretty fun,

Richard Minkley 03:05

I'm sorry.

Nick Tyler 03:05

And

Richard Minkley 03:06

What? What? Who's Scott Taylor, and why was he microwaving ants?

Nick Tyler 03:12

That's a really good question.

Richard Minkley 03:13

Yeah, it is a good question. What did the ants do? Yeah.

Nick Tyler 03:16

It's a good question. It's a good question. Fucking ants. Ants are asking for it. Have you ever seen ants? Instantly microwave the damn things. They're monsters. They don't even have their own brains. Should definitely kill a hive entity. That's definitely like the borg, isn't it? You don't want those running around? Um, yeah. Scott's a local sort of comedian and historian. He's written a couple of great books on Lost Nottingham, like the Lost architecture and space of Nottingham, that are really interesting. And he got in touch with us. In a time years ago. because he was writing sketches and wanted people to provide audio for them. So we recorded a bunch of that. No idea what actually happened to them, in the end. he had them on a website for a while. I probably still got some of them knocking around somewhere. I'll need to go digging through the archives. I certainly got paper versions, which aren't quite as good as audio versions, but, you know, we could reread them. Erm, they were, they were very odd, quirky things, and so we provided, like a cast for that. We did a live sketch show, sort of reading them at one of the Nottingham comedy festivals.

Richard Minkley 04:18

Okay.

Nick Tyler 04:19

Well, in fact, the first Notting Comedy Festival, I'm told, by an anonymous voice to one side, the same one we did, our first long form show, which was cast adrift, or custard drift, as we more likely call it most of the time, which was a sort of pre prepared soap opera where we at least took, prepared the characters on stage at the beginning, like, "Hello, I'm John. I'm brr brr brr, this kind of," I don't know, I can't remember any of it. "I'm an accountant. I and I like tea". Whatever fun character traits we thought were relevant. And then we did the custard, the cast adrift show.

Richard Minkley 04:32

Okay,

Nick Tyler 04:44

I think i still got on YouTube somewhere. So that was. Scott was pretty was not foundational in that, but was a nice synthesis and synergy of activities.

Richard Minkley 05:06

So there was.

Nick Tyler 05:07

Branching out.

Richard Minkley 05:08

So because there's going to be a lot of this as we go through this, there was still, at that point, there was still a lot going on. It may not have been the glee club or the art org, but you still have the drop ins are still running, and there's lots of...

Nick Tyler 05:21

Yep.

Richard Minkley 05:21

Additional things like you were saying about the sketch show and stuff like that,

Nick Tyler 05:26

yeah, and we produced a couple of lloydies plays by that point.

Richard Minkley 05:28

yeah,

Nick Tyler 05:30

and put those on.

Richard Minkley 05:31

So how did the community, or what effect did it have on the community? I was going to say leaving the art org, but I think it's more important. Like, where did you end up next?

Nick Tyler 05:43

We ended up in a building that's now been demolished.

Richard Minkley 05:46

Another one?

Nick Tyler 05:47

Yeah, I know, I know. We smash them all. yeah. So leaving the art org was pretty, was pretty foundational. That felt like a home. There's a lot of space there for us, and that. Although Glee was very important and was very fun. It was still those end of the month shows at the Art org that for a long time had been like our real, fun, fucking about events where we probably still got more audience to those, ridiculously, than we did at glee. We can talk about the tailing off of Glee in a bit. So yeah, it felt really close. And the only space that Rob who runs the art org, Rob Smith, Rob Howie Smith, who's done lots of stuff in Nottingham and around the country, sort of managing venues and clawing venues back from the abyss, only to later have them demolished as a grip is lost. So he, the only space he could find us was in the building next door. Which was also all part of the art organization, where there was a hairdresser, and. I don't, oh, a yoga studio, because Pete, who used to do the yoga in the space that we used to do for our jams, moved into there. And he, the only room they could find us was this tiny room. Must be, this, must have been the size of our front room, which is, what, Three meters on a square. so tiny. And it's completely blue. Not just blue, but dark blue. And, blue in a way that sucks the light from the sky and the heat from your body. It was icy. It was it was incredible. Yeah, it was so grim. Yeah. Actually, we think the first time we went into there was, first of November 2011, was our

first drop in the Blue Room. Fucking freezing. Hugely unsuitable room. There was a hole in the floor which a spider lived in, that you could see, rising with the, with the draft that blew through. So, you know, that was hard, and that was really hard to maintain, what we're doing there. It's probably the first time we paid, like, a regular monthly kind of rent as well, for a venue. Yes, that would probably our first, like, regular invoice that we were

Richard Minkley 07:50

So what...

Nick Tyler 07:51

paying?

Richard Minkley 07:52

So what was the effect on the community? Have it moving into this... it feels, yeah, this space, shall I say? I don't want to put words in your mouth.

Nick Tyler 08:03

This unsuitable space. Yeah. It wasn't great. We ended up, I think, splitting. Trying to reduce numbers, we had at any given drop in. Which was fine. I mean. I think we inevitably we lost some people, just from changing the venue. That. Doesn't matter who you try and tell, that something's happened, to, most people don't listen. It would be impossible to give information to. So we certainly lost some people. But it was at the same time we started doing more musical improv and stuff. Because we'd had Heather and Joe up from the Maydays and stuff, and they'd and. You know, and we'd had that, plus we'd just had our run at the fringe, where we ended up doing the improv show instead of a play, because that all fell apart. That's one of Lloydie plays that just collapsed at the fringe. It was most unfortunate. We did get our only Edinburgh Fringe star rating, for a show, which was nice. Four star rating. Boom.

Richard Minkley 08:52

Four stars. Very nice.

Nick Tyler 08:53

For a thrown in improv show that we put together at the last minute and did some flyers for, and [paraded] around the fringe. I think I was there for the first one. Compared that. We got our review, and I had to come back to Nottingham, and then I don't know what happened after that.

Richard Minkley 09:08

That's interesting.

Nick Tyler 09:09

It was fine.

Richard Minkley 09:10

That's interesting, though, but a four star review, you guys were, I mean, maybe you can be shit and get a four star review in Edinburgh, but you must, guys must have been pretty good.

Nick Tyler 09:18

I think we were very excited and very nervous, and that probably helped a lot. Yeah, we wanted to save the show. At least save the money that we'd sunk into it. But, it's never, never cheap, going to Edinburgh. Yeah, it was, it was a good opportunity. We, it felt like a horrifying idea. Suddenly, like, switch to doing that. I was only up to watch it and support, you know, Marilyn and the others, and then that happened. But yeah, I think that plus doing the musical improv, doing the sketch stuff, doing the Nottingham Comedy Festival, I'd started running pub poetry, which is a sort of, not an improvised show, but was a chance for a lot of people who did improv with us to do something different as well. And write their own poems and stuff.

Richard Minkley 09:28

Yeah, What was pub poetry?

Nick Tyler 10:02

Oh, pub poetry. We started running it with the comedy festival, because there's a really nice guy in Burton on Trent, Adrian Thompson, who ran a bunch of pub poetry events there for years. Who my dad knew for a reason, who knows. My dad knows lots of people. And I decided to start writing pirate stories, sometime before that. I wrote my first pirate story out in public at one of Adrian's pub poetry events in Burton. And so when the Nottingham Comedy Festival was kicking off, because that was Helen stead, who long time Missimp person at this point was, you know, deep in Missimp and regularly at drop ins, in some shows and stuff. So when she kicked off the festival, like, well, what? I guess we'll be supplying a dozen events for this then. And yeah, we did. We put a bunch and I ran pub poetry, which is two or three hour bring, open mic comic, Comic lit karaoke, was the sort of tagline. So, bring whatever you've got, whether it's yours or someone else's, and read it for other people's enjoyment. Get drunk while reading fun poems or stories or songs.

Richard Minkley 11:00

Okay.

Nick Tyler 11:01

I ran that erratically for the next four years or something, and still run it occasionally.

Richard Minkley 11:07

I'm thinking of what the best question to ask, and I think the most important question at the moment is, do you want to tell us about your pirate stories?

Nick Tyler 11:18

If you really want to know, sure. I've always written stuff. Some kind of stories, but yeah. Because I started going to some of these poetry nights with my dad over in Burton and my step mom. Just for fun, kind of nice. I had a dream and then woke up and wrote that Dream down. That was my first pirate story, which was, I think it must be the mermaid's adventure about a pirate romancing a mermaid. So it's Captain Ignatius Pigheart and his mer-wench. It's a charming tale. Not at all sordid.

Richard Minkley 11:55

Sounds delightful

Nick Tyler 11:56

wholly unsuitable for children, but has been read for children on many occasions by, for, unwitting venue managers and event hosts. And yeah, that took off quite nicely. I've read them on many events. I read them on Notts TV, amongst other things.

Richard Minkley 12:13

I remember. I think I may have been there for one of them, but...

Nick Tyler 12:16

Yes, I think you probably were.

Richard Minkley 12:17

So to kind of tie us back into the sort of Missimp arc that we're following,

Nick Tyler 12:24

Ah yeah, that improv thing.

Richard Minkley 12:25

Yeah, do you remember. One of the things I'm interested in is, in, sort of, following this is how, following, kind of what people were responsible for, and how it felt, and what, what kind of things people took the responsibility for, and. Because it kind of forms later on into the Exec. But do you remember?

Nick Tyler 12:47

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 12:50

Do you remember what you were responsible for in this post art org, post Malt Cross, er, post Glee show phase? Because I know that we,

Nick Tyler 13:01

I guess at this point

Richard Minkley 13:03

There's a couple of venues we kind of dot around to, but yeah, what did you what? What were you responsible for during that time?

Nick Tyler 13:12

I guess at this point, probably still sort of everything. I've never, I've never done much in the way of like venue management, because I don't, I'm not, I'm not really a people person. As you know. People? Give or take 'em, you know, it's fine. So that whole like, reach out, and making new relationships with people, not, not, never really been my thing.

Richard Minkley 13:30

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 13:31

But in terms like, is, I guess it's always been the keeping stuff going, right? We got dropping this week. Cool, Let's find someone to run it. Let's get that thing happening and... making sure we still had a team for Glee, although, people might, different people would organize that, whether it's me, Lloydie, Parky,

David, whoever, might arrange a team to do that show and pick the games and stuff. [...] this thing. I was certainly still doing all the graphics and whatever online presence we had at this point. Must have had a website at that point, and all that sort of jazz.

Richard Minkley 14:02

So there was...

Nick Tyler 14:02

So still kind of driving stuff, but everyone else is like going, "I'll do this thing", cool, arrange that thing, make that thing happen.

Richard Minkley 14:10

Well, that's actually an interesting point, because. It's interesting. I knew that more people started taking on responsibility around this period between like 2015, 2016, 2017 even. But it also sounds like there was still lots. It seems like there was still lots more going on, even before people like Liam and Emily and Ben and those kind of things.

Nick Tyler 14:35

Oh yeah. Oh yeah, way before that, for sure.

Richard Minkley 14:39

So.

Nick Tyler 14:40

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 14:42

The way you describe it as being responsible for, eh, everything, makes it sound like we're... is... was there any structure even as the slightest, or was it just sort of like

Nick Tyler 14:54

no. So I mean, by this point, we were long past the point where it was like the original performance team that started running drop in stuff, you know, Geoff, me, Ross Clayton, Marilyn, who am i forgetting, don't know, I'll get in trouble for some... that group.

Richard Minkley 15:12

You probably said it in the other interview. How so?

Nick Tyler 15:13

I've never, I've not met many people with whom I kind of like click immediately. Like, David moved over from France to come work in Nottingham. He's from Canada. Was [looking for] stuff to do. Had done improv in France. So came to one of our drop ins. Must of found us on the internet, somehow. And, you know, we would go and we would drink afterwards, because we always drank down the wetherspoons down by the canal, where they'd let us stay till two in the morning, drinking hard. I hope so. God, I hope so. that would be [awkward] otherwise. [...] dumb people doing music, you know, afterwards, sort of, after that stopped. Then, you know, I run all the stuff at the arts theater before getting to the art org. It was only when we got to the art org that other people started, that we got, you know, Lloydie and Parky and Dave. I mean, for me, David was it was a big part of the change for how improv

felt and what it was for. And then get, ah yeah. many, many taxi rides back with with me, Marilyn, Martin and David. Because we're all coming back to Nottingham, or going back to Beeson quite late, and then getting out for stuff the next day. Did that for a long time. But no, we and so yeah, after that, we're going to get a train. David's like, "Oh, I'm also going to get a train". "Where are you going to?" "Beeston". "Haha, we also live in Beeston. Clearly we shall be friends". And thus it was. And and that that works. You know, when you find some of whom you click very closely on stage, and off, that's that's really valuable.

Richard Minkley 16:12

wow. You said, it kind of changed the feeling of improv.

Nick Tyler 16:54

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 16:54

What's that?

Nick Tyler 16:56

He was probably the one the first people that come from somewhere else who'd done improv before. Really? Yeah, improv, [...] it still is now, you know, hyper niche activity.

Richard Minkley 17:10

Sorry, you, there was a glitch there. Say that again. Oh, I said something really important, but I can't remember what it was. hahaha, the fun. Improv was super niche back then. It's really niche now, but it was incredibly niche back then. You know, most people still don't know where improv is, so we were the only people doing improv and Nottingham, you know, we'd had, like the original performance team, and we occasionally got people like that Geoff knew from Canada and elsewhere, like Klaus Peter Schreiner, who came and taught us and did some stuff with us, from Germany, lovely man. And you know, Lloydie came to us, having been with kiwi Geoff group for a little while, and then went off and found a load of improv and brought it back. But we hadn't really had anyone who's like, "No, you know what Improv is already. interesting". You know, we've done it at uni and stuff, but not properly, and David had done it properly with other people who were doing it differently to us because we were just doing whatever we wanted, making shit up. And that felt, that felt kind of cool, because he come like, Oh, I like what you're doing, it's different to what we were doing, which is sort of validating, because he didn't say it's different and shit, which would have been hurtful, if true. So be it.

Nick Tyler 18:16

Do you remember how it was different So that was like a proper, different influence.

Richard Minkley 18:30

Do you remember what that difference was?

Nick Tyler 18:31

did in terms of what we were doing?

Richard Minkley 18:32

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 18:33

Yeah. Because what they were doing in France was a lot more, erm, they were doing it, either much more theatrically, less for laughs, but also much more competitively. You know, they would have teams playing against sort of each other and being scored and stuff, a little bit more like lot more Johnstoneian. You know, that sort of improv. It's not improv Olympics, is it? All the words have gone

Richard Minkley 18:55

Comedy sport?

Nick Tyler 18:56

Maestro and stuff, all the weird... yeah, that kind of thing, like all those, like weird formats that he thought he could, that he decided to trademark. And they were doing more that kind of stuff, but also more, less gaggy than we were doing it. You know, we would. We were much more the whose line, spin off generation,

Richard Minkley 19:00

Right, thats very interesting.

Nick Tyler 19:05

So he was, he, yeah, so he was, he was a bit more rigorous, but also now allowed to dick around properly for the first time. And we gave him unlimited license to do that. And he was also one of the many people for whom English is not a first language that we've had in missimp over the years. and have always had, which is interesting. It's a great way to up your language skills, I guess, while at the same time being wildly challenging.

Richard Minkley 19:42

Yeah,

Nick Tyler 19:42

We had Angelo [Bisignano] back in the day, who, of course, had his marriage proposal on stage during a show.

Richard Minkley 19:45

What?

Nick Tyler 19:48

At the Nottingham arts theater. It's a bit awkward now because they're divorced, but, that was lovely. That was. But that was in the paper, you know. So we've had people of multiple languages for a long time. And, you know, right now, we've got, I don't know, half a dozen people who [...] english this is not their first language, doing beautiful stuff. And I say now, I've got no idea how many people there are in 2021. Who knows? [If its four of us], who cares?

Richard Minkley 20:14

Yeah, so,

Nick Tyler 20:17

But yeah, but yeah, having. David was, it was like getting someone who I would always want to be on stage with and always would love to play with, which remains true, even though he's now in Canada. The bastard.

Richard Minkley 20:30

How dare he?

Nick Tyler 20:32

Yeah, where is my husband? He's gone away.

Richard Minkley 20:35

This is interesting, so... I'm trying to think of what the next sort of...

Nick Tyler 20:41

I've wrecked your timeline, Haven't I have. I've wrecked your timeline so badly.

Richard Minkley 20:43

No.

Nick Tyler 20:44

I think, I think following the venues is not a bad way to go.

Richard Minkley 20:47

Well.

Nick Tyler 20:48

because, [...], because the shows change with that as well, and the people change with it.

Richard Minkley 20:53

I think one of the differences between this interview and all the other ones is the first one I've done after I've had to read through and transcribe all the other ones. So I'm trying,

Nick Tyler 21:01

You fool.

Richard Minkley 21:01

So I'm trying to ask very short, specific questions and shut up a bit more. But I'm trying to think,

Nick Tyler 21:07

yeah, you're not going to get short specific answers out of me, Richard.

Richard Minkley 21:13

We were talking about the Blue Room, and many people have talked about the blue room.

Nick Tyler 21:18

I love that, because we were only there for about three months.

Richard Minkley 21:22

Hey.

Nick Tyler 21:23

It's really in the mind, though, isn't it?

Richard Minkley 21:25

And you're right as well. Talking about venues, people seem to remember where they were rehearsing more than where they were, what the date was, what year it was, or what season it was,

Nick Tyler 21:35

I think, I think that makes sense. I mean, I mean improv by its nature, because it doesn't have a location. Whatever location you're actually in, I think feels much more real. You know, that is the environment. I mean, you must have started. When did you join us? When we're at the corner?

Richard Minkley 21:50

No, I think possibly a little bit after, because I remember, I joined some of the courses when we were in the canal house.

Nick Tyler 21:58

Yeah, sure.

Richard Minkley 21:59

Which brings us on to an interesting point. Were courses running at this point?

Nick Tyler 22:05

No, we didn't, no. oh, I'm not sure if I know when we first ran a course. I don't think we ran a. I don't think, I don't think I've got, I don't think, I don't think I've got it in any useful way. I don't think I'd manage to figure out. But I don't think we started doing courses until we got to the corner, because from the Blue Room, which were only out for a few months, I do remember absolutely wetting myself doing some kind of song with David, where we're talking about spit roasting bears in the forest in the Blue Room and being unable to speak, which is, was an absolute highlight of doing improv, when you can't, both asthmatic, so we were, in some danger. Turning blue in the Blue Room. Because after that, we went to, onto Stoney Street, when we met up with the white collar zoo guys.

Richard Minkley 22:12

Nick. Yeah.

Nick Tyler 22:50

We knew we were looking for a venue, and they invited us in to use like an office space, which was warm.

Richard Minkley 22:55

Ah!

Nick Tyler 22:56

That was revelatory. And everyone was very excited about that. Everyone really enjoyed that. Did you do any, did you do any performing on the white collar zoos channel, like you personally. we tried to.

Oh, yeah. We tried to record a couple of, at least one pilot, of us getting, trying to do, you know, stuff for the camera.

Richard Minkley 23:17

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 23:17

But I think what we were really smashing into was what every single improv TV show has hit, which is, what is the thing that we're doing, and how can we make it as unimprovised as possible, so that we can control it and yet not have it be shit? And like every single TV show, I can't think of one that hasn't been shit. We failed. And so we recorded some terrible, like, scenes on a train or something, but we. It just it never felt right, and we could never get it to work. So then we mostly just dicked around in their room where we could sit on office chairs. And did lots of lots of good improv. It was a really nice group, and I think we must have started doing the annual awards when we were there.

Richard Minkley 24:00

What, do you want to tell me about the annual awards?

Nick Tyler 24:03

Yeah. Parky's initiative, I believe. A n excuse for a piss up around Christmas. And the first one we did, we did at the, Oh, damn it. What's that pub called on the corner of Canal Street,

Richard Minkley 24:19

On the corner of Canal Street? Wow.

Nick Tyler 24:21

Yeah, Fellows Morton Clayton. That's the name of the place. fellows and... fellows morton... Fellows Morton Clayton? Fellows Morton Clayton. Well, not on the corner, but like just around the corner. Before you get to Castle wharf properly. And before you get to, oh god, I haven't been in town since August. I've got no idea what anything's called.

Richard Minkley 24:39

It sounds like nonsense to me,

Nick Tyler 24:42

Sure, and we use the, We used the back room in there and set up like sing star PlayStation with a big screen so we could play that. And yeah, we did our, We did the first. Sure we did the first award in there in which people would, oh no, that would have been the second one. We did, We did a, we did a, a not proper one, where we just made little certificates when we're still drinking at, on Castle Wharf, I think. But yeah, we would nominate people for a dumb thing they've done in the year and that gradually mutated into, nominate people for things make them, like, they did the best multicolored clothes of the Year Award, or most likely to be, to pretend to be a bear in a scene, or any kind nonsense like that. And over the years, it's continued, and it's and it's grown a little bit. There was a raffle for a while when we ran at the Malt Cross. And when you got your award, you would get a raffle number, and then there would be some piece of absolute shite that had been acquired from Poundland on our low budget Christmas events. So I believe I've still got a toilet brush. And other people have been very proud to get their four floor tiles in a little pack and stuff like that, which, obviously these are all very precious.

Richard Minkley 25:58

Oh yes.

Nick Tyler 25:59

And yeah. And it became a nice way to recognize people for doing something. And then out of that, we ended up with our reward, awards for outstanding achievement or outstanding contribution, which have been running for a few years now. I believe I hold one from last year, which is quite nice, for running stuff throughout lockdown. Which is nice. It's, yeah, it's nice to be recognized. It's nice because you just do stuff, don't you. Yeah. Well, I want, I want something on a Thursday. And as it turns out, other people do too.

Richard Minkley 26:30

You've certainly found something to do on a Thursday

Nick Tyler 26:34

for a very long time, you know. And that's how we ended up running virtual pub through all of lockdown and stuff, and still running it now. That's been good for lots of us.

Richard Minkley 26:43

That's interesting. So. it's interesting because it, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it's, it feels a little bit more rock and roll than the community that we have at the minute, which is seems much more formal from what you're describing, like was, was,

Nick Tyler 27:01

if by rock and roll, you mean drunk, then yes. If that's what you mean. Yes,

Richard Minkley 27:06

it sounds like theres a lot more drinking culture in this community.

Nick Tyler 27:08

We were, well, I mean, we were a lot younger back then. Yeah, that's, um, yeah, that's a lot of this is nearly, is 10 years ago, you know when we're down at the Art Org. And yeah, I was in my, 10 years ago, early 30s, so certainly very happy to drink very hard and go out all night and stuff. And we would do a lot more of that.

Richard Minkley 27:32

That's interesting. So we, you seem to be doing a lot of stuff around Castle Wharf and the the waterways building and that kind of area near the train station,

Nick Tyler 27:44

things that are nearby and near to my route to home.

Richard Minkley 27:47

Yes, convenient. Um.

Nick Tyler 27:49

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 27:50

So we. The next. Would it be fair to say that one of the next things that comes along is starting doing more of the courses?

Nick Tyler 27:59

Yeah, probably.

Richard Minkley 28:00

Anything between?

Nick Tyler 28:02

I mean, there's a lot more shows. I think there's specific stuff, you know, that we did, you know, certain things with, with shows and stuff, and we ended up with. What happened, what happened differently? I guess this is when some of the other show formats arose as well. You know, we did, we did consenting partners for the first time around this time. You know the idea of the two Prov that we wanted to do, lloydie's idea initially,

Richard Minkley 28:32

what was consenting partners? Do you remember the show?

Nick Tyler 28:36

Yeah. I mean, we've run it in recent years too. You know, it's a format that survived. It's an evening of pairings of improvisers making shit up. So very different from having a team, very different from our shows of, that we did at the Art Org or at Glee, where it was, you know, even if it was just half short form then half a long form piece, it's, doing it with two people? Yeah. These are some of the risks that we're being, sort of, that we're beginning to take, individually and as performers. I don't know who was in the first one. We probably did it at City Gallery.

Richard Minkley 29:11

Yes.

Nick Tyler 29:14

I bet I did. I bet I did a show with David. I don't know who else. Probably Lloydie and Martin would have done, would have teamed up. Can't remember who else. We might have a fly somewhere for it. Who knows? I believe I came with a name. I named lots of our shows because I like, I like the names of things. Consenting Partners, like people dancing, or something.

Richard Minkley 29:32

Well, you also named smash night, but that is a gem that's waiting for us in the future,

Nick Tyler 29:36

Well yeah, because before that, we devised gorilla burger. Originally, Fucktotage.

Richard Minkley 29:36

Okay.

Nick Tyler 29:38

Which was. I'm sorry what? What was it called? Fucktotage.

Richard Minkley 29:49

Fucktotage? The hell does that mean?

Nick Tyler 29:50

Fucktotage. It is meant to, well, I feel it still means the chaotic spirit of a gorilla bugger. Where we do, you know, stuff. And it was meant to be a, because we did initially at City Gallery as well, which turned out to be a, sort of, swing in venue for us in between being in other places. It's where the book shop that has a name, nine, nah, seven leaves, five leaves?

Richard Minkley 30:15

Five leaves.

Nick Tyler 30:16

Five Leaves Book shop is now. thank you. Some number of leaves.

Richard Minkley 30:22

Hold up signs. No, I'm not. I'm joking,

Nick Tyler 30:24

Very. That would be helpful. Yes, and Fucktataj was a lot of fun to do, but yes, perhaps not the best name, so we ended up with Gorilla burger, which makes a lot more sense for everybody.

Richard Minkley 30:37

In no way whatsoever.

Nick Tyler 30:40

We used to get people like, just come, just wander in. Like. A drug addict wandered in, during one gorilla burger show. He was, he was after, he was after a pen or a needle or something. We just gave him a pen. On you go mate. Its cool.

Richard Minkley 30:53

Okay.

Nick Tyler 30:55

Stab that in your arm. Do what makes you happy.

Richard Minkley 30:58

Oh, wow. That's interesting. So I know that, do the courses start happening in the corner? Is that?

Nick Tyler 31:09

I think so.

Richard Minkley 31:10

Do you remember how you, what happened, how you, wound it wound up in the corner?

Nick Tyler 31:15

Yeah. Rob Smith, again. you know, we weren't doing anything much with White Collar Zoo. Their whole project of having a streaming music. What was their plan? Was it to have, like, live streaming music gigs, wasn't it. But where you'd pay for it. Just turned out not to be a go-er. I don't think. So they were, they, they knew, they were changing venue. They're gonna downsize to somewhere else, where they could run their crazy projects. Lovely, bunch of guys. They were ace. We. So, yeah, we're like, "Rob. Find us a home". He found us the corner, which, which is now, what is it now? Pizza. Its a pizza house, isn't it opposite?

Richard Minkley 31:49

It's Oscars and Rosie's. Oscar? Oscar and Rosie's.

Nick Tyler 31:51

Thats it

Richard Minkley 31:52

Yeah,

Nick Tyler 31:52

Oscar and Rosie's. My God, not being into town for nearly a year really blows your mind, doesn't it?

Richard Minkley 31:56

Well, fortunately,

Nick Tyler 31:58

which is opposite, the opposite, the old Angel.

Richard Minkley 31:59

Fortunately, everything's been closed since then, so you haven't really missed much,

Nick Tyler 32:03

I guess not, but I could have walked past and remembered the name. So when we moved in there, that was, again, a regular residence for us that we were going to be in, properly, every Thursday, as we were paying rent, again. In a building which was, now, what's the best word for it?

Richard Minkley 32:18

What was the corner like?

Nick Tyler 32:22

Erm... You ever got tetanus from walking in a room?

Richard Minkley 32:27

Well, yes. believe it or not, it was the corner.

Nick Tyler 32:31

Yes, it was. Amazing. It was Yeah. At times grimy. But it had this weird, massive stage that was really, it was on, it was like, four and a half feet in the air, like, because it's an old bank, that went around the inside windows. Which was amazing stage. We did some great shows on that. We did, we did gorilla burger there. We did unspeakable acts there, for the first time, I think.

Richard Minkley 32:56

Whats unspeakable acts?

Nick Tyler 32:57

Which was the show were. I think Martin came up with this. I can't remember exactly. Where you'd start off with a script. So you do like the first, first page of a script between you, and then just literally toss it into the audience and continue. I remember us doing Jaws there. I remember being a shark. Not quite sure what happened, but it was a lot of fun.

Richard Minkley 33:19

Good.

Nick Tyler 33:20

That's a good format. We should do that again. We haven't done that for a while,

Richard Minkley 33:23

So.

Nick Tyler 33:24

But yeah, the courses started there because Lloydie in particular wanted us to be advancing your skills in a particular direction. He'd had all of his time at UCB. 'Course, now defunct, burnt out theater, from hideous mismanagement and awful people. Exciting. Like Improv Olympic in Chicago. All these institutions going bust. Never, never have Gods and heroes. They will fuck you over. As they're only people. And institutions are the same. But he was keen that we had a program of teaching people stuff. So I believe the three of us, he, me, him and Parky, by this point, were like the, were a proper like, organizing triangle or triumvirate of activity. No specifically like out, no, no specific tasks individually. I don't think. It was more, Well, here's some other people you can rely on to ask questions of and think about stuff together

Richard Minkley 34:21

which it's interesting. How did that,

Nick Tyler 34:23

Which was helpful.

Richard Minkley 34:24

It's interesting. Lots of people have used the word triumvirate, which makes everyone sound very clever.

Nick Tyler 34:29

I, it does, doesn't it. it's great.

Richard Minkley 34:30

How did that work? Like? What was it like?

Nick Tyler 34:32

It was really good. And you know, it came out of what we were doing down at the Art Organization, when we were organizing shows. For planning the next monthly show, we'd go and drink at Broadway or somewhere, on a Sunday, for hours, and like, scribble down what was going to be in the show. And you know, there'd be people there every time. Both Lloydie and Parky came along later. Parky, a little bit later. Timeline screwed in my head. But you know, there'd be, there'd be us, me and Marilyn. David. Geoff. Ross, when we're still doing stuff at the Art org. Carla, heavily involved at that point, would always be there with sort of drinking and ideas. Andy Peggs, [...] Berry, wonderful, who were from back in the olden days, when we did this stuff. And that sort of kept going, even though with different and fewer people. Because how fun is it planning a show? And it would end up being people who wanted to do a thing. Lloydie has always been ambitious, and so would always want to have a, an organized thing. You know, I'm, I don't have plans. They don't exist for me. The future doesn't exist as far as i'm concerned. So having other people who are like, great, we want to do a thing like this. All right, cool. Let's try not to be dicks about it, but otherwise cool. Let's do a formal thing. And see if we can make that work. And it seems to [fall together] quite naturally. You know, people, people who want responsibility, people who want to get stuff done, invariably want to take responsibility too. And they will stand out. I would like to do this. All right, cool. As, as I think, and I hope, always been my approach, that if someone wants to do something like, great, all right, let's try and make that happen.

Richard Minkley 36:20

Yeah,

Nick Tyler 36:20

Cool. Let's, it worked. Great. Lets have some more. You're now in charge of it.

Richard Minkley 36:26

That's interesting, because it. It feels like, would it be safe to say that this kind of period that we've been discussing from the Blue Room, through Stoney street, the corner, is that the sort of reign of the triumvirate where those kind of things were happening, and, I believe you also said it kind of stretches into the Art Organization as well.

Nick Tyler 36:50

Yeah. I mean, yeah, it's somehow from that period, I'd need [to know] when people actually started joining us, I don't know, I've got, I've got a very old list somewhere that I used to scribble in a notebook,

Richard Minkley 37:00

Yeah,

Nick Tyler 37:00

Of the names of people who attended each drop in, when we were the Art Org for several years.

Richard Minkley 37:04

Wow.

Nick Tyler 37:05

That was why. Fire list, in theory. You know? So if it'd be, because, not like the corner, which is definitely a fire risk. Did i tell you about when we're at the corner and the fire alarm went off?

Richard Minkley 37:14

No, but please, do.

Nick Tyler 37:16

We, So halfway through a drop in, the firealarm started going off, and we're like, oh, that's not good. I mean, we can't see there's anything on fire, but you can't get you can't get upstairs to where leftion offices are, and they're all. Jesus. God knows what they've done. You can well imagine they just set light the place and fucked off. You know. Shit in a bucket and set fire to it. God knows. You know. And I'm Not From London were up there as well, I think at some point, so. God knows what Will and Brian and the rest of them would do. yeah, we couldn't get up there, so there's no way getting hold of anyone. So this fire alarm is just going off. That's annoying. And then you just continued? What, what should we do about it? So that there was a like, somewhat reluctantly scrawled, like, laminate sheet under it with a phone number or something you could call. so we rang him up. I don't know who. Not sure if it was Rob. It might of been someone else. Might be horribly slandering Rob here. Yeah, the fire alarms going off. We're gonna leave. Do you want to do anything with it? Nah, it's cool, mate. Right, so, to be clear, we're currently in this, we're currently in this space, we're using it, and we're paying for it. The fire alarms going off, and we're leaving the venue, and we're going to leave it locked and closed, maybe with a fire in it. And that's okay. Yep. Cool. Let's go gang. Quickly, to a place that's not near here. And you're like, oh, really. I don't know. It got used for a lot of strange stuff, The corner. Which is why I once put my hand down the back of one of the chairs and found, a condom and a packet of lube, and you're like, oh.

Richard Minkley 38:50

Condom and a packet of lube.

Nick Tyler 38:51

That was a sex chair.

Richard Minkley 38:52

Oh my god.

Nick Tyler 38:53

That was the sex chair, and no one ever used that chair again.

Richard Minkley 38:57

Wow. This is, this is interesting, because, it feels like, from my point of view, originally, I thought that this period was very, it seemed bleak because it was framed by the loss of what had gone before and the fact that it wasn't quite what I know it as now. But.

Nick Tyler 39:17

No, it wasn't. It was informative, formative period.

Richard Minkley 39:20

It's interesting, though, because you used the phrase that you were taking risks when you were describing consenting partners, and you did it a little bit sarcastically. But is that a useful way of understanding those years in, again, I keep wanting to read into it and call it like in the wild, where you are scrounging for places, was it,

Nick Tyler 39:42

Oh no. Bloody historians, getting false narratives for it. Yeah, no. I think it's formative in a bunch of ways. Being, being, you know, being a regular venue allows people to coalesce, and that's really important [...] to go. There's always a thing going on at this place that I can turn up there on a Thursday, and it will be cool. Even if I'm away for months. Not being the same venue as crippling for that. Not being a place that you can do shows is really damaging. You just can't. You can't maintain a community. Doing that at the same time as we're experimenting with leadership, I guess, which we've been experimenting with for a while. Having never wanted to be a leader of anything, or wanting to be in charge, but just ends up in charge, because Geoff went away, and someone needed to run stuff, if we wanted to run stuff. Then, yeah, there were experiments in that. So experiments in power sharing, for what little power there is. But if you want, if you're. If you want power and it's important to you, then, you know, you're going to fight for it, whatever it is, against other people who, like myself, don't really give a shit about the power. And yeah, we certainly, there were certainly arguments that spun out of that. [-]

Nick Tyler 40:55

But for those people who did want to be in control, it was a challenge for them because they dealing with people who maybe didn't want control. And didn't want to see people conspicuously grasping control. I don't like people who are grabbing control, I don't like it when people are like, I have to be in charge of this. Err, do you? Is that really what we're doing? Are we, because it seems like we're a thing that fucks about on Thursday, and occasionally does bigger stuff. And depending on your ambitions and what you really want from the world, that's either sufficient, or a fucking nightmare. We definitely had people on both sides of that. And so we had to learn to compromise, as well. You know, had to learn to work together. There were, there had been, like putative organizational frameworks put forth before this point. You know, sort of, constitutional ideas that. Is this really what we're doing? It took a very long time to realize that we were becoming an organization, I think. I don't. It's not something that I ever felt that we were until. Certainly, til well into The Corner, that we were like, a thing. You know. This is just some people dicking around. And I. In a lot of ways, I liked it more when it more when it was just people dicking around. You know, that felt free.

Richard Minkley 42:43

It's interesting that, a term you used in the last interview was arsedness, which conflicts with people's ambitions and their their drive. But at the same time, kind of, can't be arsed. It's interesting. So. It does seem, though, like, it was still a lively period for the community, like it may have lost these things, but you guys were still, or, from the way you've described it, you guys were still trying ideas and.

Nick Tyler 42:54

It does. Oh yeah.

Richard Minkley 43:13

You may have described it as, like, not particularly wanting people to have control when they're kind of seeking for control. But a lot of these things stuck or paid off or seemed to work.

Nick Tyler 43:27

They did. Oh, they did. And teaching courses was great.

Richard Minkley 43:31

Did you teach courses?

Nick Tyler 43:32

Yeah, yeah. Who. Because originally, we taught in pairs. And that was good. And we still do sometimes, because it's good as a teacher, and it's good, I think it's good for the people are being taught. Depends, it depends on how singular your vision is. You have a singular vision that you don't want to share, then you probably don't want to teach with someone. And thus, many other things happened. But yeah, and that was good. That was a really good experience. We taught a lot of people. Liam joined us. I'm not gonna get any of the timelines right, but Liam joined us, did a course and stuff, for example, and that was all, that was all very. It was good because you learn a lot about what you're doing by teaching it.

Richard Minkley 44:16

Yeah?

Nick Tyler 44:17

Inevitably.

Richard Minkley 44:19

Tell, tell me about that, as a way of, kind of. Because we're at the first half of the interview.

Nick Tyler 44:25

Sure. What did you learn? Or, yeah, what did you learn about improv by teaching it? I mean, I've been learning it for a while because, you know, I've been running drop ins, purposely, since, you know, quite early, but doing it formally along a syllabus, a syllabus, so, say, Lloydie outlined, we all filled in, was, was, felt very different. You know, so we're going to, we're going to try and build up someone. Trying to construct the box, it is, that makes someone an improviser. And realizing I'd gone through none of those steps and was then trying to teach people that was, it was, intriguing. It's, you know, structure works some people. I think it finds you a way to articulate things that you already know inside about how things work. You know, when we finally got the articulation of 'Yes, and' for example, which we didn't have in the early days, because, you know.

Richard Minkley 45:12

Really?

Nick Tyler 45:12

It doesn't exist in who's line. Its just doing stuff. yeah, we didn't. There was no terminology. It was like, we're going to play some games. It was a while before, [...] trying to break down, what are the things that make the games work better. And figuring out, oh, actually, that's when you agree with stuff, isn't it? Oh yeah, it is, isn't it? We don't break the reality of it. Oh yeah, that works. Yeah. Well, because these things aren't obvious. And actually, if you, if you read Keith Johnstone's agonizing, egomaniac diaries of how he invented improv and is a genius, you know, its all, we discovered by agreeing, we could, we could we could agree, and we could do things. And I'm a genius and I invented this thing. But, you know, but he is correct about the sensation of learning together, and the revelation of even something fairly trivial that you're doing, as being a thing that genuinely does work, and feeling that synergistic energy when you're when you're playing together, and everyone, and everyone's in agreement, and everyone's on, vibing off each other. Yeah, I've seen you guys doing the vox pops, and suddenly you hit like, oh, there's a thing, and you're off, and you're completely in sync. And it's very funny and good. And teaching more people who are coming to you, and, in their heads, there's a status association as well, because you're teaching. If you're teaching, you're in a position of authority, which

means you're right. Up to a point, you know. The presumption is that you're saying things that you, that are correct in order to help other people. And so, you know, the first point is that you're the one who's in charge, and that's that's not some, that's not the way that I felt about improv, really, ever. I know, I know I am often in charge, by default. Like hosting. Sure, you're in charge, but that's hosting to enable participation, if you see what I mean, rather than like being the one in charge. And teaching was like a, is a formal, being in charge, responsible role. And that that, I think, [...] because it did make me think more deeply about how I improvise. Oh, it's frozen, hasn't it. That's epic. It froze a little bit. But My face is frozen. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 47:21

you said that it,

Nick Tyler 47:22

Oh, that's good, because my.

Richard Minkley 47:24

Your face is frozen.

Nick Tyler 47:25

My face is frozen, hilariously, on my screen.

Richard Minkley 47:27

you look very calm. Um, there's a question,

Nick Tyler 47:31

that's nice, not same on my screen,

Richard Minkley 47:33

The. You were describing the courses, forgive me, um. It's interesting, because I compare that to what you said about, David joining, who was the first person who kind of did improv somewhere else, then came to MissImp. It suggests that all of the improv that you'd been doing before then was also having to teach people how to do improv, to play the games, because people didn't do improv beforehand. What was that?

Nick Tyler 48:05

That is true.

Richard Minkley 48:06

What's the difference between those two vibes? Because both of them are teaching people improv, but one of them is a course with this kind of structure and status, and the other one, is not. What's the difference for, in your opinion.

Nick Tyler 48:22

Teaching with a course has as a as a goal. Has an intended outcome, which is that someone is able to do X, Y and Z. And, you know, and we say [certainly something about] the earlier plans. I'm not sure if the syllabus does now, but, you know, has intended objectives of this section, you know, participants will be able to, you know, describe what status is. What what agreement means in context. And will, ultimately, will be able to do a scene, potentially, to a given standard, which is where I've got some is-

sues with, with teaching improv. And that's very different from like, right, this is how this game works. We're going to play it a lot. Which is, but we're not any, necessarily. Obviously, you want to play the game, like, do it well, but without having, like, a list of what things make a game of 'whose line' good. You know, we had some tips and stuff that we would share and develop, but it didn't, it didn't have the same outcome. The goal was just to mess about and have fun, fundamentally, rather than to become an improviser. I think that's the difference.

Richard Minkley 49:22

that, that is very interesting. Because you said that, you felt weird about the idea of doing it to a particular standard, or something like that. What was that issue?

Nick Tyler 49:34

Yeah, not so much that I feel weird. It's. I think we're teaching a subjective skill set. This isn't like. I don't think this is. Improv isn't like maths and stuff, where, in theory, you can learn the rules to do it, and then you can execute those rules. In improv, that's true to a point. You know, we can. We can give people a bunch of tools and skill sets, and most people can, can go and have fun doing improv. Not everyone will be able to execute it to the standard of, I don't know, a UCB show or whatever. I don't know. It's something that I've never really quite got clarified in my head, but. There's a set of expectations, I think that, if you do a course, you'll be able to that and go and do something. And we use it as as a baseline standard for skills that people will, will be aware of, that we can then put them to use for in a show. But I'm not convinced that an improv course necessarily means that someone [can] then immediately just go and do a show. Or is of any, or is of a particular standard. They'll have been given materials and told things and had a bunch of experience... [call disconnects]

Richard Minkley 50:43

Uh oh. We may have lost Nick. Well, this is a pretty good point to end the first half of the interview, so I'm going to hit stop recording there, and.

b) Part 2 of 2

5th November 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

improv training, improviser definition, clique dynamics, Monk Cross move, Vox Pops, Smash Night, Vortex, Rhymes Against Humanity, MissImp history, improv courses, community growth, perceived status, formal structures, 20th anniversary, personal challenges

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Nick Tyler, Marilyn Anne Bird

Richard Minkley 00:00

Also here. There we go. So, this is Richard Minkley interviewing Nick Tyler for the Missimp Oral History project. It is the 23rd of March, 2021 and it is about five past seven. Yeah, you were going to talk about the difference between teaching improv for games and improv on a course?

Nick Tyler 00:20

Sure, yeah, I think the difference is for, for teaching improv on a, like drop in, or a jam. We would teach people to just to play games and have fun. It was about the objective. The objective was just to play this game, and mess around, and enjoy yourself. Teaching a course, the objective is to end up with someone who is an improviser. You know, you're training someone to become an improviser. Is at least the idea.

Richard Minkley 00:42

This.

Nick Tyler 00:42

Which I think, is implicit in the idea of a training course.

Richard Minkley 00:45

This is, I feel like this is a question that I should have been asking for a very long time, like I've already got about, I've probably got about 38 hours of interview, and I've never asked this. What is an improviser?

Nick Tyler 01:04

Really good question.

Richard Minkley 01:06

Put some big, heavy quotation marks around that.

Nick Tyler 01:09

Heavy quotation marks. For a lot of people, it's a badge of honor. A description of someone who takes part in a, somewhat outsider, niche activity, that is both better than stand up and better than acting. It's also anyone who just fucks about a weekly drop in, someone who has some fun. And, I fall down the side of the second of those categories. For me, being an improviser, definitely secondary to messing around with friends. Yeah. I'm sure there is a fancy technical definition, someone who can

spontaneously generate comedy with a group of other people, through some synergistic application of group mind, or. That all just, I mean, that's all true. Its also just bollocks, isn't it? It's a willingness to have fun with other people. I'm gonna go with that. That's what makes someone an improviser.

Richard Minkley 02:05

I love that.

Nick Tyler 02:05

So training. So training someone to be an improviser is very different, because you're training them to do, training people and a bunch of techniques that are tools that will enable them to go and do a thing. And I've just never been convinced that, that's how improvisers are made. Ultimately, I think everyone, almost everyone who ended up on stage that I know has turned up to improv and has been really good at something to begin with, and you've gone, oh, I could see them on stage. Certainly, true for Liam when he showed up. It was, I mean, he was impossible to play with. A bundle of energy that just couldn't stop fucking moving. Jesus Christ. And, and, like, blocked, because he was over excited doing stuff. But yeah, you were clearly like, yeah, you'll be on stage. You'll be great. So, you know, you could equip that, But there's loads of other people who can, you can do improv training. It's a bit like me doing, you know, I learnt to drive a car. Fucking terrible at it. Didn't pass the test, and so I don't drive a car, but I could still do all the technical stuff. Didn't make me didn't make me a driver. Didn't make me a good driver. It make me want to drive. Actually, that's a less terrible parallel than I thought it was. In the same way you can do an improv course, not necessarily to become an improviser, you can do it for lots of reasons. And although you might complete all the exercise and do all the stuff in it, it's not necessarily going to get you into a show, or make you a person who is ready to be in a show, or wants to be in a show. I don't know. I vacillate and flick back and forth on what the purpose of training is, for this stuff.

Richard Minkley 03:37

You are very good at articulating dichotomies, because you've got, you've got, the sort of ambition versus arsedness. You've got, the improviser versus just mucking about. It's good stuff. Now. So this is interesting, because the transition from the corner [-] to the Malt Cross. Loads of stuff happens there. Let's start off, just to differentiate, lots of people start getting involved and doing their own things. Like, well, like, like Liam, like Ben, like Emily, like, there's all sorts going off. Minder's there, putting things in place. Does that happen before the Malt Cross or after the Malt Cross.

Nick Tyler 04:25

It all happens before we get there. Or at least begins before we get there. So my timeline is not good. I mean, we knew Ben and Emily because we'd done, because they were both in the same year at uni, and we had links to the student, the improv soc for a while, and we'd always had some, back and forth with people. You know, years before that, we'd had our team up show with the guys from Bangor. Imp Soc at Bangor, which where we [...] have Phil Carruthers from. You know, and he, or Anthony, whoever was organizing it got in touch and said, "Oh, we're doing like, a world tour of like, four cities, and we want to do a show with you Guys". And were like, "Cool, we'll book a show at glee". And we did. And it was very fun. That's how we got to know all them. And then Phil came back to Nottingham after uni, and we kept him. So in a similar way, we had Ben and Emily and lots of other people. Whole bunch of the early Vox Pops members were Nottingham uni gang, weren't they? So we'd always had those connections. And again, when people come who are good and who want to do stuff. We've attempted to let it be known that people can do stuff if they want to do stuff. And that can be a hard

thing to parse, I think. It's why. Improv, and all groups, are innately cliquey. And cliquey within cliquey and all that sort of stuff. And, yeah, everything's, everything's impenetrable culture, isn't it?

Richard Minkley 05:44

Well,

Nick Tyler 05:44

but when people do want to do stuff, then, we've always, I've always wanted people to do things. And to be, and people want permission to do things from someone who apparently is in charge, which is ridiculous. Like you want to do that. Great.

Richard Minkley 06:00

I think this is an important question to ask, because you were saying, like improv can become very cliquey, and with your position as, kind of, someone who responsibility, sort of, the kind of, role, the shit rolls uphill to you. You have often been in that cliquey, in that cliquey group. What was that like for you?

Nick Tyler 06:26

It's funny, isn't it. I think probably one of the defining characteristics of a clique that isn't in a US high school drama is that you don't think that you're in a clique, and you don't perceive that you're a gatekeeper, in any particular way. In ways the teaching makes the gate keeping worse, because you're explicitly placing a gate, and yourself as a gatekeeper.

Richard Minkley 06:48

And you're charging people to come through the gate, in a very specific way.

Nick Tyler 06:51

Indeed. Yeah yeah yeah. Which is why, when you have a gate and a gatekeeper, you need to know what's on either side of the gate. Otherwise, there's no point having a fucking gate. That's. Yeah, which is a semi serious point about what the point of training is. You know, the idea was to make the clique of people who knew what they were doing larger so that we could do more stuff. But, in terms of being in a clique, hmmm. At its best, it just, especially when we're doing like the Art Org shows and the Glee shows, it, it felt like a bunch of people who were mates, fucking about. I think that's probably what all the best cliques that aren't Bullingdon club, feel like. All organizations when they're going, when stuff is going well, feel like. I suppose, for myself, never having felt like I was supposed to be in charge, then I, maybe that made the clique thing feel less distinct to me. Something I was less aware of. It's like, well, "yeah, I want to do a scene", cool, literally all you have to do is say so. But of course, from within that position, it's, you can't see that that might be a hard thing to ask. Or a hard thing to request or demand. It's tricky. It's hard. Certainly, like, the early days of the Art Org, when there were, you know, a dozen of us, tops. Those were the, those were the people that, they were, they were the people that were, who were all of our friends. In lots of important ways, you know, when people were temping and stuff, you know. Those are your friends. Those are people that we would then go and drink with, and go and party with and have parties with. And that that was challenging as that became a much larger group of people. You know, not all people that you've necessarily, chosen. If you see what I mean. Or have found themselves through commonality. As that group gets bigger, you also find more people that, who you you love and adore. You're inevitably gonna find people that you don't adore. And I don't, I've never known how you're supposed to pass that in an organization of any size, of any sort. And I suppose part of my resistance of being an organization, is not wanting to have to

pass that, you know, to have to then have that extra responsibility. Well, I still just want to dick around on Thursday. That's still my primary driver. Why do I then need to have extra rules around it, that, that force organization and rules and stuff. I don't know. Troubling. I would like not to be in that clique, but I don't know, I don't know any way of, being out of it. I don't, you know, to clique with an outsider culture to begin with, which is a weird thing.

Richard Minkley 09:24

yeah, because, as again, again, when you put it very well, where it says talking about cliques outside of American High School dramas, which seems to be a very, you know, everyone has a table and a costume and all of this stuff. And it does, it does seem to fit that. A lot of people. In fact, I'm not going to say what I think. I'm going to try and phrase it sneakily, as a question.

Nick Tyler 09:50

Oh, you're try, try and make me say it.

Richard Minkley 09:52

Yes.

Nick Tyler 09:52

All right, fascinating.

Richard Minkley 09:53

No, but it is. It is interesting that a lot of people come to improv for friendship. And to be a part of something. But at the same time, as, as the community rolls on, you have different levels or different groups, or if it's, as you were saying, the more people turn up, these, kind of, smaller groupings and cliques, kind of, begin to form, and you seem like the least likely person to set one of these things up and put one of them in motion, because you keep talking about how you're not really in it for the power. Do you know why you keep ending up in charge of stuff, and why you keep,

Nick Tyler 10:35

I don't know.

Richard Minkley 10:35

Ending up in, in a, in a group or in a, because even, even in the broader sense, just being a part of Missimp, is a sort of clique within the broader theater culture. Maybe clique isn't the right word for it. I don't know.

Nick Tyler 10:50

I suspect hierarchy is probably a better word. Yeah, there's a natural hierarchy once you start something that some people are going to be in shows, some people aren't. Which, just to go back, you know. In part, that's what courses were supposed to partly address. If you've done these courses, then you can be in a show because you've done X, Y and Z, but as I said, doing X, Y and Z doesn't mean. This doesn't make you ready or the right fit for that thing. Why do I end up in charge? I don't know. Responsibility weighs heavily on me for stuff, and if I feel like I've agreed to do something, I'm kind of fucked, because I find that very hard to get out from underneath.

Richard Minkley 11:33

I mean.

Nick Tyler 11:34

I

Marilyn Anne Bird 11:34

(very quietly:)Its because geoff went to Banff.

Nick Tyler 11:38

Yeah, i know he went to [Banth?], but. Sorry, Marilyn's pointing out that, the reason I ended up in charge to begin with is because Geoff went away. But then, even then, there was still me, Geoff, there's still me, Clayton, Ross and Marilyn,

Richard Minkley 11:52

Well, this,

Nick Tyler 11:53

Still ended up with being me out of that. Who like said, we're going to do stuff.

Richard Minkley 11:56

Well, this,

Nick Tyler 11:57

but we encourage, Yeah, we, Yeah. We encouraged people to do that. As soon as we had like enough people who could, like, do some, showed the desire to do it. Yeah. David' run them. Parky and Lloydie, run them. Marilyn would run some. David would run them. Martin. We got everyone to run a bit when we we're doing drop ins. I guess I probably still did most of them. Don't know. That started to fade away a little bit. We got more and more people to do stuff at the corner. I guess part of it, it's that I'm prepared to be there every Thursday,

Nick Tyler 11:57

I don't know,

Richard Minkley 11:57

No, I think that's very interesting answer. The idea of, like, trying to get this clique expanded and kind of include more people in it, that. Again, we may be like, clique and community may be becoming interchangeable, which I think isn't wise. But this brings us on to the kind of next chapter, which is a lot of people keep turning up and taking the initiative for things. I believe that during this period you had more people running the jams. So like in the Art Org, Parky and Lloydie. And then in,

Richard Minkley 12:58

That, that is a big commitment, because you've been.

Nick Tyler 13:00

It is.

Richard Minkley 13:01

How many years have you been there on a Thursday?

Nick Tyler 13:05

Oh. It's a lot of years. I mean, it's going to be since before 2006. So, 2000, but, probably since about 2004? 2003? I can't remember when we started doing started doing stuff for the Art Org. not the Art Org.

Richard Minkley 13:26

So that's a decade of experience.

Nick Tyler 13:30

Before we even get to this point.

Nick Tyler 13:31

Yeah yeah. It's. Yes, I, and that's why I went on about [commitment] weighing heavily. We have, we have a thing on a Thursday. Well, I'm gonna fucking be there then. And I found this the same with the shows. You know, that we're running on a Friday. Its like, well, I guess that's what I'm doing then. And I must, I do occasion, I did occasionally get annoyed, because some people like, well, I'm going on holiday. I'm gonna go and do this thing. What the fuck are you talking about? We're doing this thing. I don't know. That they feel. They felt immovable to me, and they felt like things that I, I committed to. Even if I hadn't really committed to them. Maybe I hadn't committed them, but I just thought I had. But if I hadn't, then who else would have shown up for it? I don't know. I don't know. I have a complicated relationship with commitment.

Richard Minkley 13:31

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 14:17

It is very interesting to know that you don't know. It's a valid answer, and it's really interesting. It feels like we've been blaming you for everything. So let's blame some other people for some stuff.

Nick Tyler 14:27

Cool. I'm excited about that.

Richard Minkley 14:28

Around this time. As we were saying, people turn up and people start taking the initiative of doing things. What was that like, when this triumvirate began to not to be so Triumvirate-y.

Nick Tyler 14:39

Well, it's great and it's great and it's terrifying at the same time. I mean. You know, to digress slightly and something that will probably edit it out. We were trying to, right up until we started running courses, actually, and I think that that was when the first split between Parky and Lloydie occurred. And then. Parky and I went on and ran the courses, and it was a while before Lloydie circled back, despite deciding to run things on a Thursday, the same night. But in, like, in, as a rival activity elsewhere. Like, the height of twatishness, which was splendid. So, before we even get to the point of adding more people, we'd already had, quite severe fractures, and stuff. You know, Marilyn had resisted being in charge of anything, for quite a long time, sensibly. And it was when we started, spreading the teaching pool, of people who would teach, that people, inevitably, end up with more responsibility. You know, I can't, I can't remember who we brought in first. Probably, Marilyn would have been first, out of, sort of, me, Lloydie and Parky that we brought in, because I wasn't always

available. And it's good, because Marilyn is, by far, our most improvised performer. Yeah, an actor and has done, and actually, done more training than anybody else had done. Certainly at that point, for in any form of acting. So, was rightly in a, put in a teaching role. And that gives you responsibility, by default, because you're tracking people coming and going, you're gonna get paid for it. You're going to have to do stuff.

Richard Minkley 16:06

Your gonna have to turn up on a Thursday or whatever night the trainings on.

Nick Tyler 16:09

One would hope so. And then, yeah, other people want to stuff. So, like, Eddie wanted to do bits and pieces. So this is all, this is all, like, pre organized. But you know, Eddie wanted to do particular show formats, and, yeah, at gorilla burger. So we're like, cool. Let's do that. You know, we did some sketch stuff with Eddie as well. Which was fun. It's like, great. Let's do more of these things. There's a wonderful thing about people coming up and going, I would like to do a thing. Ah, phenomenal. That means I probably won't have to do it. It's not always true, but it is really great. And it's always different, because it's never what you would have done. It's never what you would have done or how you would have done it, which is, and that's always terrifying. He's like, Well, I want to change all the things that you've just done, or that you've just said, but that really won't help, because then that would be me doing it, and it won't be you doing it, and it won't be the thing that you wanted to do. And that's, that's [...], it's quite hard to learn. I've seen a lot of people not learn that, and I'm sure I've not learned that at times.

Richard Minkley 17:04

What do you mean quite hard? What's quite hard to learn?

Nick Tyler 17:07

It's quite ,so say, you come to me, and you say, I'd like to do this show, that I think, it's got these things. I'm like, Cool. Right. Well, there's a problem with that bit, so let's change that. Let's not do that bit. How about we do this instead? Call it this. Do it then, and get these people to do it. He's like, Oh, I've just taken your idea and changed in something else, and it's no longer your idea, it's my idea, and now I'm doing all the work, and you're just sad. That's. It's a constant risk, you know. I see that at work all the time. You know, it's what. This is, what, it's what life is like for a manager. You go, here's the, heres the spreadsheet I built. Great. Let's change all of that. You know. That's a constant risk, isn't it, for anyone who's managing other people in any, in any context, whether it's lightweight or serious.

Richard Minkley 17:51

But.

Nick Tyler 17:52

But it's great. And learning to, learning to relax and step back is very important. And great.

Richard Minkley 17:58

That's interesting. So. That's interesting. So what came next? Oh, actually, no, yeah, you said that. A lot of the people stepping up happened at the Malt Cross. Do you remember the move to the Malt Cross? Like, do you remember the first kind of experience there?

Nick Tyler 18:15

It must have happened before we went to Malt Cross, because, before we go, before, we'd gained, you know, we'd gained Ben and Liam and Emily as regulars before then. Before we moved to the Malt Cross, because we were, yeah, God, we were at the corner for a long time. Trying to figure out how long, because the date will give me, I'm trying, finding it on my list, because that will give me context for when it actually was.

Richard Minkley 18:36

Great.

Nick Tyler 18:37

First, first year in the corner was in 2013, so still, we're talking a long time ago.

Richard Minkley 18:41

Wow, that is a long time ago.

Nick Tyler 18:43

And we didn't move to the Malt Cross till.

Richard Minkley 18:47

I believe it was 2016

Nick Tyler 18:50

Yeah, might have been, might'n it, yeah. oh yeah, yeah. March, 2016,

Richard Minkley 18:54

Ha ha, got one right.

Nick Tyler 18:55

Good work. Yeah. So. We'd done loads of stuff by then, and it was exciting, and it was still cool, but we had a much larger group of people because the corner was big enough to accommodate a lot of people. And certainly Ben, Emily Liam, must have been in place, doing things. If not necessarily, yet, stepping up for organizing. And then when we moved to the Malt Cross, that was, that was like a, that was a proper home, to move to, because obviously, Missimp's first ever show was in the Malt Cross.

Richard Minkley 19:25

Yes.

Nick Tyler 19:26

Long time. Way before my time. Yeah, we weren't there. But it's like it was a proper venue as well. It wasn't a tetanus filled hole. Where you'd catch diseases by breathing. For all that we loved the corner, it was a mess, and, you only really recognized how bad it was when we left, and look back, went, ho ho ho, that needs to be burnt.

Richard Minkley 19:48

So was the main difference then, just, the environment that you were doing improv in. Is that the main difference between The Corner and the Malt Cross?

Nick Tyler 19:56

I think so. It's, because, you know, it feels, sort of, cleaner and smarter and neater. It felt like we were in a proper place. And therefore, it impresses on you, like, a responsibility, well, if we're doing a proper place, we've got to do a proper thing, right? So it felt a little bit more formal, I guess, in a way, felt like we'd, we'd up, we'd leveled up, in some odd sort of way. But you're right. Looking at the dates. We must have had, all those people in place, to mess around with. Yeah, everyone must have been there by that point or very soon afterwards.

Richard Minkley 20:30

Obviously they've

Nick Tyler 20:31

At the Malt Cross.

Richard Minkley 20:31

They've got their own timelines that we've already recorded.

Nick Tyler 20:33

I would love to know when people actually started Impov.

Richard Minkley 20:36

Don't because

Richard Minkley 20:37

I would be fascinated.

Richard Minkley 20:38

Oh, It'd be. It'd be amazing, but terrifying at the same time, because I'm in there somewhere.

Nick Tyler 20:43

Because Ben's on, Ben's on, like, a 10 year anniversary or something, isn't he? And I'm like, I don't know how that makes, that, that can't. What? Really? Oh, yeah. And it's amazing how much a weird blur it is. We should have taken more photographs down the years of, you know, people in a room. That would have been really useful.

Richard Minkley 20:59

Yeah,

Nick Tyler 20:59

I've got odd pictures, of like, everyone at the corner. We should find some of those, actually, because that's, because that's when we got Eddie, and people like that, who end up being stalwarts, all the way through. And, you know, has survived COVID, so far, which is cool.

Richard Minkley 21:11

That's interesting. So. To kind of bring it back to the basics, we've, we've kind of gone through the courses coming into existence. There's been lots of frictions, and then we moved into the Malt Cross. Obviously, there's fewer condoms and lube, or at least, I one would hope.

Nick Tyler 21:34

Well, yeah, but they're in a machine. You can get them on demand. They're not just on the floor, and in the furniture.

Richard Minkley 21:41

Wow.

Nick Tyler 21:41

Its a massive step up.

Richard Minkley 21:42

How posh.

Nick Tyler 21:44

Yeah, it felt like going to a club for the first time when you're 14. It's like, oh, these things come in a machine. What's the

Richard Minkley 21:50

so did? Was it literally just the same thing picked up from the corner and dropped in the Malt Cross? Or was it, did, did the actual craft that you were doing change?

Nick Tyler 22:04

I feel like it did change a bit. And a part of that was due to being in a cleaner space. You know, we decided, some time before that, I think, while at the corner, that, our drop ins should mix both fucking about and some practical training. You know, because, we'd always had concerns, or I'd say I had that, people can't afford training, can't afford to do a course, can't afford the time, can't afford the money, but still want to get better at this thing. And there's no point just coming along to a drop in if you're like, great, there's some things, now fuck off. You still want to get better incrementally. And you know, the drop ins don't work as a training course because you don't have the same people. You don't have continuity. You can't continue to do a course, although that's exactly what I'm planning to do when we get back after COVID. To run the drop ins as our level one course for a couple of months, because everyone's gonna need to level back up, and no one can afford to pay for that. I'm much more interested in getting people back in the room than getting money off them. It's ridiculous. MissImp has never been about money. Which is why all we did last year was spend money, and didn't charge anyone for a single thing. This is fine. That's was our first year of a CIC, where, our stated intention, part way through, it was like, Yeah, we're going to make no profit out of this. What are you going to do? You gotta keep the community going?

Richard Minkley 23:21

Thats interesting though, because you just said that people want to get better, and obviously that that makes sense on the courses. Was it that vibe always there, in the in the 'Whose Line Is It' era of Missimp?

Nick Tyler 23:36

Yeah, yeah. Because you knew you, because you knew that you got sharper, and you got more reliably funny. Your hit rate improved, from one scene out of 10 that's funny, to, you know, eight or nine out of 10 at a good times. You know, you know that something's changed and, everyone, and you could feel that. You come for a bunch of weeks and you're better at this. Which is why repetition of games is good. It's why gorilla burger, why the drop ins veering into Open Scene training, end up

leaving people unprepared for gorilla burger, because we didn't do much of the games. You know, the moves, the move to do more long form is clever and fancy and like, Oh, this is the art. But actually, if you want to do fun, quick stuff, you probably want to do short form. But if you only do long form, your short form declines, whereas short form is the core to me, increasingly, the more I think about it, everything you learn in short form you should be applying in your long form. It's less good the other way around. You know, short, short form is long form, but shorter with rules that help you be funny.

Richard Minkley 24:36

That is a fascinating opinion that I'm sure loads of people will, listening to the audio back of this, will be very angry about. Ah, it's wonderful.

Nick Tyler 24:44

I hope, i hope so. And fuck em. That's fine. So. So yeah, we were taking, we were taking our drop ins a bit more seriously by the time we got to the Malt Cross which. So, when did you join us? So, you we're at Malt, you joined us at Malt Cross, before.

Richard Minkley 24:58

I joined in. I remember, I googled it and found a course on. Hang on a minute, you've turned the interview over, you've switched,

Nick Tyler 25:06

yeah, I have, I have, because I need context, though. I need context.

Richard Minkley 25:10

No, but this is actually a very good point, because I joined before smash night, before, the vortex and the female work, focused workshops, even slightly before the Vox pops. So it is about the time where sort of a very shy Richard turns up and sort of has a breakdown in one of the courses. That was fun.

Nick Tyler 25:32

Aw, bless you. Yes, I know. Yeah, okay. Does that make sense. Because arriving at the Malt Cross was the. A point where a lot of things happened after that. So Rhymes emerged at that point. Rhymes Against Humanity. Lloydie wanted to do more musical improv, because he was doing it with The Maydays, but thats too far away, and even though he's traveling down, God knows how often. Just couldn't, just couldn't do anything. So Parky you gave him the name, which was splendid. Good name. Good name. Remains a good name.

Richard Minkley 26:00

Yes.

Nick Tyler 26:02

And they did the auditions for that at the Malt Cross. I know because I went along to, I went along as a, as a ringer, to the audition. It was like, Well, I can't fucking sing. I can't do musical improv. But what we want is for people to come along and audition and not worry about whether they're good enough. We recognize there was a clique. And that there was a perceived hierarchy. And though musical improv is not my thing, improv in general, was my thing. So I could go to the audition and be terrible, and it gives other people permission to turn up and not necessarily be great, or to turn up and go, well, they're there and they can't sing, so, how bad could this be. Which proved to be quite an effective technique for that. If horribly stressful, because I don't, I don't enjoy the musical improv. I'm not, I don't,

doesn't make any sense to me. I can't sing and I can't put words together, in that order. I can't hear music. More importantly.

Richard Minkley 26:58

That is really interesting, because. Yeah, I mean, it chimes in, 'some of the stuff we've talked about status, which is a big thing in improv in the first place.

Nick Tyler 27:08

Perceived status is even more important than actual status.

Richard Minkley 27:11

What do you mean?

Nick Tyler 27:13

So. And, a lot of this ties into, you know, I want, I wanna be on a Thursday to mess around, but because you're the guy collecting the money, or telling people send in a circle, that gives you perceived status that you don't feel. And so, you know, it's all about perceived status, really. I guess, actual status doesn't even matter. You know, you behave in a way that you think is appropriate with that person, because of what you, what status you perceive them to have. Never thinking that they don't see themselves that way. It's, it's ever so odd.

Richard Minkley 27:40

That is fascinating. So this is, this is interesting because. A lot of people began perceiving that they, too, could do something in this community. Now, I've got, we, I would love to go through each one with you. What was. What was it like, setting up smash night? What was it like, setting up the vortex? What was it like, the Vox pops? What was it like, rhymes against humanity? But, the people involved in that have, already had their own interviews, if not two,

Nick Tyler 28:14

I would hope so.

Richard Minkley 28:15

And they've told their stories very well. In this time. Okay. There is a difficult period here where, the people in charge, it expands a bit, and then it shrinks a bit, and it feels like there's a lot of.

Nick Tyler 28:30

The shrink is later. The shrink is later. I feel like, I guess, I guess the question I would ask me,

Richard Minkley 28:40

Oh my, please, do my job for me. Go for it.

Nick Tyler 28:42

Only because this has occurred to me. So we have a lot of people, doing stuff. You know, as you say, we have Lloydie setting up Rhymes. And doing a lot of stuff with that. Taking up a lot of time. We have Ben setting up the Vox pops. We have Emily initiation of vortex. Liam organizing smash night. All of which I had input into in some sense, either in, discussing what they were going to be. Whether they were going to be part of MissImp, and what our relationship with them would be. Whether it's like designing graphics and stuff, or finding names and like being part of it, like I got to be the host of the

smash that social club, for example. But, I wasn't in any of them. Which, and that, that was the first big difference, for me, for MissImp, for 15 years.

Richard Minkley 29:35

Really?

Nick Tyler 29:36

yeah.

Richard Minkley 29:37

How

Nick Tyler 29:37

so,

Richard Minkley 29:38

How did that feel?

Nick Tyler 29:40

It was really good.

Richard Minkley 29:41

Really?

Nick Tyler 29:43

It's really good. Yeah, because we, so, we were like, great. We gonna to set up a musical Improv. I won't be in that. Bens going to set up the vox pops. I won't be in that. Vortex. Can't be in that. Smash night. I'm not going to organize it. Yeah, I can. I can host the Social Club, which is purposely just fucking carnage, I mean, that's, that's how Liam built it. So that I could just have a thing, because I wasn't performing in anything other than gorilla burger. We didn't have any shows, you know. So, gorilla burger, we, not long after we started doing millions of voices, The Star Wars Show that, Martin Parky and I came up with in a car journey. But other than that, I wasn't, I wasn't doing anything. I was just, I was running drop ins and being in drop ins and being in gorilla burger, and probably hosting gorilla burger. But I wasn't in the shows. And it was, it was really good. It was weird, because, like, well I, I still turned up to every single thing anyone that was on, but. Yeah, I wasn't in any of them. And that was new. There were very rare shows that we did at Glee, when I wasn't in a show, or something. So that felt very different. And that was really nice. It was like, Oh, look at them. They're all doing the thing now. The little baby birds are falling out their nest, killing themselves on the tarmac.

Richard Minkley 30:56

Yeah, no.

Nick Tyler 30:57

The cats fucked them up. That was really good. It was, it was weird, definitely, but it was really good.

Richard Minkley 31:05

What was weird about it?

Nick Tyler 31:07

Well, because. Well, it's not being in the other cliques, isn't it. You know, ultimately, you're like, Oh, I'm not in that little group. I can turn up occasionally, and I occasionally turn up and, like, ran a session for Vox Pops or whatever. But you guys are doing something completely different by that point, anyway. From what I did, so, and I could annoy you. And maybe give you a different, a different viewpoint on it. It wasn't what you were doing, fundamentally. And I couldn't turn up and do anything valuable with rhymes. Maybe I could of done with the vortex. But yeah. I guess what you see is these groups, like, then splitting up and going away. Far away from you. And it made, and it made a very big difference. I guess it badly fractured, the thursday night drop ins for a while. Because all the people that we'd seen every Thursday, you know, Lloydie, Martin, Marilyn, Ben, Phil, whoever, you know, all the people that are in these teams. What we used to do was we'd come together on a Thursday and fuck about. But then everyone was doing a rehearsal on a Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday. They were doing their improv thing. So why would they come on a Thursday? They we're already getting their improv fix. So that was. That was odd. So it was sort of. Then it was everyone who, everyone who hasn't gotten into a team, was the people who were there on a Thursday. And I guess in terms of perceived status. I don't know whether, i don't know. Someone else would need to answer it, but, you know, for me, that was like, well, great, we're the people that aren't in those teams. So we're like, Oh no, we're like, we all might be different, like, we all might be different, ability levels or whatever, or experience levels, but we're all the people that aren't on a team. So this is our Thursday thing. And you know, from a friendship point of view, that was really tough. You know, for a whole bunch of people. They were the people I'd seen every, every Thursday for years, and now they were doing something else. So I'd see them maybe once a month. Maybe much less. Maybe never again. Because they we're doing something else. And that was odd, because for me, the whole point of it's always been to have a bunch of mates to fuck about with on a Thursday. You know, that's that's been core, right the way through for me. And remains, that remains true. Thats why I'm running, it's why I run virtual pubs. I want mates to hang out with on Thursday.

Richard Minkley 33:16

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 33:18

And

Richard Minkley 33:19

It's interesting, can i.

Nick Tyler 33:20

Everyone went. Everyone went away. In a self pitching sort of way. But they did really good stuff. So, I can't complain too much.

Richard Minkley 33:27

It's interesting. You used an interesting word when you were describing people, setting up teams and things, and these, these.

Nick Tyler 33:33

God, the way you listen to this drives me insane, like, picking up on words, man,

Richard Minkley 33:36

Well, well, this is it, though you just said, like, Oh, what is the relationship with this team, this group, this activity, you never described having a relationship in quote marks for all the other shit you've described. Why did this feel like a relationship? Or why did it feel that kind of term was needed or something?

Nick Tyler 34:00

Because we'd, well, I don't know if it's the right term, but, it's because we'd genuinely devolved responsibility. You know. So Ben was gonna run, run Vox pops, where Emily would have the vortex. They can always come for assistance, because, it was all being run under the umbrella of Missimp. But, certainly for me, I was like, I don't have any I have no particular influence? I don't need to be, constantly asking questions, or being come to for things. There's people properly going right, I'm going to do this thing, and I don't necessarily need input, from someone who has whatever qualifications to give input, anyway. Why would you come to me for advice. The hell's wrong with you? What kind of broken human are you? Worst person to come to for advice? So that, yeah, that did feel. It felt like a separation and a splitting of interests and activities. You know, I get, and, which, I guess. Probably led to some of the later fractures and splinters. Inevitably, people are doing their own thing. And they want to do their own thing. That's cool. But when you want to do your own thing and then influence the rest of. The, the. I'm not sure. There's no metaphor that really works out without the umbrella, does it? The person underneath the umbrella really ought to direct the umbrella. Otherwise they're going to get wet. So that's not, that's not really an applicable thing. The umbrella should shelter everyone. That's the better one. So if you're moving around in such a way, the umbrella can only shelter you. That's problematic. But if you're dragging the umbrella, and other people are getting wet, that's also problematic.

Richard Minkley 35:34

I'm going to put an end to this metaphor, because it's terrible.

Nick Tyler 35:36

Oh, please. I love it. I like it, and I'd like to work with it. I like to go, go as far as, what happens when you suddenly close the umbrella by accident. do you know what i mean.

Richard Minkley 35:46

Okay, but.

Nick Tyler 35:46

Which we could have done by just walking away, I guess, at any time.

Richard Minkley 35:51

You said there was fractures. There was, the kind of things were breaking apart, but at the same time that kind of, one of the next things that happens is this exec forming. Do you remember when the idea of the exec began?

Nick Tyler 36:04

I'm going to keep, that's a good one.

Nick Tyler 36:04

I don't know when we labeled it. I, you know, it will of almost certainly been labeled by one of the people who are far more interested in formal structures, like Lloydie. Or possibly, possibly Parky, not

that likely. Or Liam, someone, someone who's had experience of being in the some kind of committee where they're like, this needs a name. He's got to call it something. Otherwise your like, well, who are you, the Missimp bosses? But yeah, I remember having conversations with, particularly, Liam, and Minder, outside of, like, the triumvirate of me, Parky, and Lloydie, deciding things, and then occasionally linking other people in. And then deciding to try and bring it all together. It wasn't, it wasn't an entirely popular move, bringing people together. More people, more people to make a decision is tough. You know. It means you have more inputs, more more ideas, more thoughts. Therefore, naturally, more things that don't agree and don't align, and you have to negotiate what a degree of compromise looks like, and, what agreeing to disagree can be. And sometimes you can't agree to disagree, and that's okay too. You shouldn't always compromised. Compromises, I've defined in the past as a failure of both parties to get what they want, which I stand by as a definition.

Nick Tyler 36:21

Because otherwise, because otherwise, someone's won and the other person hasn't. And that's not always apparent while it's being done. But yeah, that whole expansion was, I can't quite, I can't quite remember what happened. I think it was partly because, necessarily, anyone who was running a team needed to have a voice and needed to be accountable to the rest of the people who were enabling that to happen. Because, if you remember, you remember we were funding these things. You know, we put thousands into rhymes.

Richard Minkley 38:01

Wow.

Nick Tyler 38:03

We bought them a keyboard. It's a £600 keyboard. You know, all that stuff. We paid for training they got, you know, people up, Tim Sniffen from, wherever he was, and other people to train them. Yeah, we used to pay those coaching sessions. Pay them for. This was for Rhymes, for the vortex.

Richard Minkley 38:21

I don't mean to this to sound, condescending or scathing or anything, but why?

Nick Tyler 38:26

Go for it.

Richard Minkley 38:27

Why did you pay for those things? Because, again, you were describing this, this sort of dispersing of improv into other people, and you dispersed some money as well. Why did you do that?

Nick Tyler 38:39

Look, not my money. It's not my money. Missimp's money is not mine. I might have kept it in a box for a long time, of several 1000 pounds in coins. But you know when, when, when the triumvirate put it in a bank account, you know, that became a Missimp fund for funding improvised activities, whatever they may be. And you know when it split into those, into those teams, you know, because we subsidized lots of training events before then, you know, when we'd get Heather and Joe up, and when we get people to come do training courses, people from UCB, we'd heavily subsidized those things, so people got a chance to experience a different kind of improv. Training with people who, in some sense, are world class professionals, or whatever, because it's different. Sometimes. Sometimes it isn't. Sometimes you're like, well, that that was shit. I learned nothing. How are these people

respected individuals. Status and perceived status, again. You know, just because you're, because you're from a place and you say you do a thing doesn't mean you're any good at it or interesting. That should be true endlessly. So when we split into the teams, yeah, they were specializing in things, and they were discrete teams that we could go, right, these people are working on the same thing, at a similar level, because that's the aim of being in a group, is to homogenize in terms of. Homogenize is the wrong word, but. To level up together, I guess.

Richard Minkley 39:54

yeah.

Nick Tyler 39:55

To reach that same level together, and that means you're suitable to be trained together and coach together. And, you know that, that as a process can really escalate and elevate where teams go and how, how groups of people can improve. And so, yeah, we, that's what the money was for. It's like, great, We've kinda got three, four teams. We can use this money to make better.

Richard Minkley 40:16

Did people ask for the money or ask for the support? Or was it you guys had the money, and you were like, well, here's an idea. How about you take this money.

Nick Tyler 40:26

A bit of both. But there's certainly, you know, say, Lloydie wanted to get trainers and teachers in, to focus on this stuff. You know, the only way to do that is put money at it. You know, you can do some stuff that you subsidize. You can do other stuff where people pay for it. Or you just go, right, we're going to pay for a coaching session, of, you know, 400 quid to get a teacher in for a day. You know, because that's what it costs, and that adds up quite quickly.

Richard Minkley 40:48

Yeah. So we're coming to the end of the interview, and there's something very important we need to talk about, which is the 20th anniversary.

Nick Tyler 40:57

Okay.

Richard Minkley 40:58

Do you remember the first mentioning of by the way, we've been doing this 20 years?

Nick Tyler 41:02

It'd probably be Parky who pointed out, and remember it, because, people who have dates in their heads. I'm not dates person. And that seemed, that seemed crazy, that's 20 years old. And from that, from that, the idea of developing a bigger thing, moved quite fast. So, you know, rent out the Malt Cross for a day, for an evening, you know, [...] gonna have a birthday party downstairs on the Friday night. Friday, Thursday? Friday night? Friday night. You know, arrange a bunch of shows to celebrate it, down at, down at Nottingham Playhouse. You know, it all seemed very big. It felt very serious, in a sense. You know, like, ooh, that's like a big anniversary, you know, yeah, as anniversaries are intended to be. You know, this is a big thing. You know, you're now 20 years old. Time to die, or you can drive a car or take heroin. I don't know what you're allowed to do at different ages anymore. Lots changed since I was a boy.

Richard Minkley 41:56

That's very interesting, because it seems that the 20th anniversary and the exec, the formalization of the exec into the CIC. Did they happen, sort of alongside each other, or were they separate events?

Richard Minkley 42:12

They were being discussed at the same time. You know, and that's a lot, that's where the fundamental fracture happened in the exec, and what used to be the triumvirate and stuff. A lot of that happened in the run up to the exec, in the run up to the 20th anniversary, I think part of that's the, you know, the combination of, pressure, like, we're putting on this big event, we're recognizing MissImp is 20 years old, that therefore it must be these things, you know, it should represent its community. It should be broader. It should be less cliquey. A lot of that stuff, a lot of those ideas, kicked in at that point, and that's when, you know, all the other people brought in properly to, so it wasn't just the triumvirate in charge. It was like, right, okay, we're going to give these people, all these other people, Liam, Ben, Emily, you know, whatever formal is like, when you're not formal. You know, Marilyn, properly for the first time, like, recognizing actually, you spend a lot of time doing this, and you spend a lot of time thinking about this and having an influence in it, but don't have, you know, an official place, bringing all those people together for the first time, going right, this is now the people who organize and arrange things. Oh, Minder too. My bad. For a while. And then, yeah, I think, the pressure of that and people then wanting to be like, well, we need to become like a proper company, which I guess was, very Lloydie and Liam really pushing hard for that.

Richard Minkley 43:39

Well, it doesn't seem like a very Nick idea. How did you feel about how did you feel about the CIC? Or just incorporating in general?

Nick Tyler 43:51

It didn't feel necessary to me, and it feels, like it, felt dangerous, as a thing. You formalize it, then, then you're responsible for it, I guess, in a way, there's a degree of extra responsibility, accountability, that I didn't want, didn't want to feel, didn't want to recognize.

Richard Minkley 44:11

What didn't you want to recognize?

Nick Tyler 44:13

Well, I don't like formal structures. I dislike formality in general. I don't, I don't. It doesn't, do anything for me, I don't need a title. I don't need, oh, you're now in charge of this thing, to feel like I'm responsible for something. Other people do people. Some people really like labels. Some people, cos it's really important, fundamentals, like, oh, man, I don't know, need to be able to go and say I'm a director of this thing. You have some people that, that makes a difference. I don't understand it personally. Because, you can do an improv scene and be a billion things and label none of them. So what's the difference in real life? Not sure. So, I didn't really want to do it, but, everyone else did. Everyone else thought it was important. Well, not everyone else. A lot of, everyone else thought that there was merit in the idea. That it had. There was purpose to it. And that it would overall be a better thing. And I guess, much as I've done everything else, Missimp, like, you guys want to do that. All right. Cool. Let's do that then. I didn't feel it was my, I guess I could have kiboshed the whole thing. Maybe I should have done. Maybe I should have said, no. Not gonna do it. But, I guess never really felt like, again, that was my place or thing that I had the power or the right to do. Missimp's not me.

Never was. It was always a thing that people did. And so I shouldn't be able to just stop it from changing into something else.

Richard Minkley 45:51
that's

Nick Tyler 45:51
[custodian] of sorts.

Richard Minkley 45:53
That is, there is a lot of self awareness in that. How does that make you? How do you feel about that the idea that, you know, MissImp has changed into something that you didn't really fancy.

Nick Tyler 46:13
I'm still up and down on it. I'm still, you know, some days I'm like, oh, yeah, this is, this was a good move. This is cool. Other days i'm like, well, what the fuck have I done this for? This means I definitely have to do a thing, doesn't it? Because, because, for me, it's just another weight of responsibility. You know, it's not, it's not a change in what I do, but it is an additional responsibility. You know, I've just, I've just been compiling our accounts for our first year as a CIC. Our company report, like, what the fuck do I have to do these things for? You know?

Richard Minkley 46:48
This is interesting. I too am a director of a CIC, and I too am being bamboozled by accounts. So I know what you mean.

Nick Tyler 46:55
Well, give me a yell if you want some help. I figured out what we need to do.

Richard Minkley 47:01
this. It's interesting,

Nick Tyler 47:03
But what I do like about it, is, has been the ability to, since, go right, we're going to properly open this up and give other people proper responsibility. Because other people seem to like proper responsibility. It means something to them. That, I think is good. You know, I think, now, post all the fractures, and all the fighting, now that we are a CIC, with not the same group of people who were before, that it can, it can do the community stuff, especially once we've passed COVID again, and we can return to being, the community group that we began as without before all the leveling up and additional cliques that were added through the teams, we can go back to being the community group for fun and then see where we go from there again. I'm hoping that we're looping back to Arts Org level activity, but with people who want to do a bunch of shows, other show ideas, in there. Maybe it worked. Maybe, maybe it'll be different this time. Maybe it'll work out differently.

Richard Minkley 48:05
Well, I'd love to say, well, and you, you incorporated, and then this happened, but you incorporated and then there was a global pandemic. We are not, we're not sure about whether the two are connected. However, it's interesting.

Nick Tyler 48:19

Well.

Richard Minkley 48:19

It's very interesting that these tough calls and changing and sort of like, growing pains almost or adjustments, coincide with the 20th anniversary. What do you remember the actual events of the 20th anniversary?

Nick Tyler 48:39

Well, for me, it was a it was a mixed affair. You know, we'd just had, sort of, a real bad falling out with a very close friend that never got repaired. Or it certainly hasn't today. On the night, because. So the way the 20th anniversary ran, we had our celebration party at the Malt Cross. Then we had two sets of, two nights of two shows at the, at the Playhouse. I was going to be in the last one, in Smash night, because, again, not in Rhymes, not in the Vox pops, not in the vortex. Therefore, can't be in any of those shows. So, so yeah, I was, I was compering and being in Smash night, that's a phenomenal show. That was really good fun. Tons of fun. They were, they were all really good. But for me, the weekend. It was a really bad start. On the Thurs, on the, on the on the night of the celebration, birthday, Jesus Christ, I can't even do words. The birthday party, which, Liam and I were to be hosting.

Richard Minkley 49:34

Yeah,

Nick Tyler 49:35

And, Marilyn, Emily and Ben had arranged a whole night. I can't remember, even remember, how many shows there were? Like 20 little micro shows?

Richard Minkley 49:43

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 49:43

It was a crazy night. It was beautiful. Marilyn was running around, getting people back and forth from the stage all night. As I arrived at six o'clock, I got a call, to let me know that my step mom was in hospital having just attempted suicide. And was in intensive care. So, was unconscious and had not retained, regained consciousness. This is what I found out as I arrived at the Malt Cross.

Richard Minkley 50:08

Wow.

Nick Tyler 50:09

For our 20th anniversary celebration. So, I had, it must have been a quadruple whiskey, as I arrived. I was like, this is what I require at this point, in order to get on with the evening. That was a pretty rough start to the weekend,

Richard Minkley 50:29

You don't say.

Nick Tyler 50:30

Sadly. So, I didn't even get to go and, just because there was so much on that weekend and, my stepmum and wasn't even conscious anyway. When I got to see her, must have been [Sunday], and I finally went over to see her, after that sort of crazy weekend, because they weren't even letting people in for the first couple of days. So that was quite intense, really, and that colors a lot of it. But, my mum and step dad turned up for the show, which is really nice, because for several years now, we've done, we've offered scholarships for our courses, which is the Colin Barnfather Memorial Award, which was my uncle, my mum's brother, who died on a climbing accident, having been a long time supporter of missimp, and had been at all of our Glee shows. Loads of shows at the Art Org. Its what brought us together, actually. Because we'd always been, we've always been friendly. And he bought me science fiction books and stuff, which was great. And we got on on that level. But he was a big fan of, like, Radio Four comedy and stuff. So, starting to do the shows, was a real nice hook in, for us, and we were a lot closer as a consequence. And, you know, spent, you know, that one night a month, together doing stuff, doing a show, watching show. We got photos of him helping us set up and strike the set at the Art Org and stuff. So you know, we have the, we have the Memorial Fund in his name. Funny story, the first time we did gorilla burger after Col died, we've made it a kind of memorial. And we raised money for the Lochaber.

Richard Minkley 51:52

You raised money for what?

Nick Tyler 51:54

The Lochaber Mountain Rescue group, which is like in Scotland, where he died. He died when he was walking. Fell off a cliff. Unfortunate. They didn't find him for a month. That was a stressful fucking week, stressful month, in fact. Ah, god. So we're tying back into a lot of stories, that no longer anything to do the 20th anniversary. Except in my head, it is.

Richard Minkley 52:11

The weird. The weird thing is, that's not the only story I know of someone who died tragically in a climbing accident, and then people wanted to do scenes about it.

Richard Minkley 52:11

No, no,

Nick Tyler 52:11

Because, because, because he should have been at a Glee show, you see, he's there every month. And I was like, oh, Col's not here. Huh, that's weird. But then immediately forgot, because we're in the middle of a show and doing stuff afterwards. It was a phone call from my mum, a couple of days later, like, was Colin at your show. Because he'd been away, had been away walking in Scotland. He should have been back for it. I was like, No, he wasn't. And I thought about that at the time, but forgot about it. So like, Yeah, he's missing. The police have been called, work don't know where he is. And that prompted, you know, a month long search of the highlands for him. Doesn't have a happy ending this part of the story, just in case you thought it might have. Yeah, they found him. At the foot of a cliff. Got of him out, the Lochaber Mountain Rescue, in a helicopter and stuff. All very grim. Not a good, not a great time. But because he'd been such a presence at all the shows, everyone knew him. So we did the next gorilla burger as like a kind of fundraising thing. And, you know, I talked a bit about Col, tried not to cry, all that sort of stuff. And then every single fucking scene, was about people standing at the edge of a cliff, perhaps falling off it. Because, it was right, it was right there at the top of your

consciousness. You know, right there. What you thinking of when you're gonna start a scene, everyone's gonna die! And, yeah, that was the whole show. It was great.

Nick Tyler 53:41

Oh, yeah, Pat's other half.

Richard Minkley 53:43

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 53:43

Yup. Yup. I remember.

Richard Minkley 53:44

That's extraordinary, but gosh.

Nick Tyler 53:47

Crazy, isn't it?

Richard Minkley 53:47

So

Nick Tyler 53:48

And so yeah, all of that kind of wraps up and colors very much, my feelings for that anniversary weekend.

Richard Minkley 53:54

It's interesting, though.

Nick Tyler 53:55

But it was a wonderful pulling together of people. To do so many cool things.

Richard Minkley 54:00

I could sit and easily talk to you for another 1000 hours. This is fascinating. I really mean it. However, I think it's time to bring it to a close. I'm gonna I'm gonna return to the same question that I've ended all, most of the interviews with, which is, why do you keep coming back to do improv? Now, I think we've, we've already discussed how you want to do sh, stuff on a Thursday. But.

Nick Tyler 54:26

Does that not sound like a sufficient reason? Is that, is that your point here?

Richard Minkley 54:29

Well, there are people in the community who come on a Thursday, and dick about, and then go home, and that's not you. You are. You are as much the bedrock of Missimp as people like Geoff and, well, yeah, other than Geoff, you are one of the longest serving leaders to use,

Nick Tyler 54:55

Marilyn pips me to the post. But yes, I think that's true. Otherwise.

Richard Minkley 54:59

Why do you keep coming back to it?

Nick Tyler 55:03

I'm really good at routine.

Richard Minkley 55:05

Yeah.

Nick Tyler 55:06

Yeah yeah, no, routines. Routines work. It's partly, partly it's routine. It's just. It now is what I do on a Thursday, and has been such a long time. Also, I like it. I like I've come to like facilitating other people's fun. I enjoy. It's why I like writing gorilla burger, even if I don't play. I like seeing everyone else dicking around, enjoying themselves. It's fun. I can't give you a complete answer.

Richard Minkley 55:32

To be honest, I think that is a complete answer. It's just a simple one. And like, you don't need to have, well, I went on a vision quest, on some.

Nick Tyler 55:41

Ah man.

Richard Minkley 55:41

You know, but

Nick Tyler 55:42

I couldn't get on one of those.

Richard Minkley 55:45

I mean, if you want to talk about what happened in lockdown, I'll talk about vision quests. Good God. But I think that, this is basically a good place to end it. Is there anything else you want to add on the end?

Nick Tyler 55:55

Not right now. There might be something else that occurred to me later. But I guess, I'm very grateful to all the people that have come and played that I've got to know through doing Missimp, even if some of those friendships have ended very badly, I'm still very grateful for the time that we spent together. And for the fun that we've had, and all the weird stuff, all along the way. And just having people to go for a drink with. Has been phenomenal. and I have no idea what my life would look like without it.

Richard Minkley 56:26

That's a wonderful point to end on. Thank you very much for your time. I'm gonna to

Nick Tyler 56:30

No worries, man.

Richard Minkley 56:30

Stop the recordings.

5. Helen Stead

5.1. Interview 1 of 1

a) Part 1 of 3

22nd June 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Nottingham, glee club, comedy, improv, comedy festival, bit, comedy store, festival, shows, remember, nice, people, Rachel, gig, interesting, glee, mike, tonic, big, chat

SPEAKERS

Helen Stead, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

Recording. There we go. We are recording locally. We are recording on Zoom. And there we go. We are live. So, I'm going to start off by saying it is the 22nd of June 2020 at 10:36. I'm Richard Minkley and I'm interviewing Helen Stead for the Missimp oral history project. It is Helen Stead, isn't it?

Helen Stead 00:26

It is Helen Stead, yes.

Richard Minkley 00:28

Okay, fantastic. Just so I get my pronunciation right, before I make a fool of myself.

Helen Stead 00:33

That is correct. Yeah, that's my working name now.

Richard Minkley 00:38

Okay. And also, I tell you what, I'll say for the sake of the recording as well, we are recording over Zoom on account of the COVID-19 epidemic- Well, pandemic, which is kicking off, so it's not going to be the same recording quality and could be a little bit choppy, but we soldier on. So let's get into the fun bit. What is your first memory of Missimp?

Helen Stead 01:04

This memory will be back in 2008. So I'd just graduated from University, and I wanted to meet new people and do new things, and do something for a bit fun. So I looked and thought, "Improv, that sounds interesting," so me and my friend Rachel turned up one day, I think we emailed Geoff Monk in advance and just said, "What's going on?" He said, "just come down and see what you think." So we did, we went down to the Art Organisation. There's big sofas in there, so we just crashed out on the sofa and just played games and had a laugh, and went to the pub.

Richard Minkley 01:41

Oh, that sounds delightful. There-

Helen Stead 01:42

It was just a fun day.

Richard Minkley 01:44

Oh, that's interesting. I didn't know they had big sofas at the Art Org. What was- Do you remember what you did in that first session?

Helen Stead 01:52

Not exactly. Cus I was quite nervous [...] and had never done anything like it before. I just remember everyone had to do instructions and then just do little games and get to know each other. I can't remember exactly what we did but I do remember spending many hours just crashed out on the sofas and jumping up when the games are ready.

Richard Minkley 02:12

Oh, that's not bad!

Helen Stead 02:13

It's good fun. It was, it was. It was a laugh.

Richard Minkley 02:18

Oh good. So you were saying- I'm just gonna double check with names. You said your friend Rachel came along. What's Rachel- Am I alright if I ask what Rachel's surname is?

Helen Stead 02:28

Rachel Greensmith.

Richard Minkley 02:30

Greensmith.

Helen Stead 02:32

I think my friend Felicity might have come along as well thinking about it.

Richard Minkley 02:35

Felicity, what was Felicity's-?

Helen Stead 02:38

Felicity but she only came along for one session. So those two kind of popped in for a couple, then left again and I stayed on.

Richard Minkley 02:44

Okay. Um, so this is kind of 2008, you just left Uni. Was it your first-? I was gonna say, was it your first comedy experience? I don't know whether that's too vague a term to put on it. Have you done-

Helen Stead 02:58

-Comedy experience. I'd never performed or done anything like that. I'd seen comedy shows because I went to Lincoln University, so I remember going to the Engine Shed in Lincoln and watching comedy

there. I used to go down to the Comedy Store to see the Comedy Store Players so I had a bit of an idea of improv and comedy, but I never... I thought, why not do some- Pardon?

Richard Minkley 03:20

You went to London to see the comedy in the Comedy Store in London?

Helen Stead 03:23

The Comedy Store Players. Yeah, I got to see those a few times and thought, this might be fun.

Richard Minkley 03:29

Was that your first experience of improv, seeing the those players, or did you see it online, or on TV?

Helen Stead 03:34

The Players and Whose Line Is It Anyway. Which you probably hear a lot.

Richard Minkley 03:40

Oh yeah!

Helen Stead 03:41

Whose Line and the Comedy Store guys.

Richard Minkley 03:43

Yeah. I'm just gonna double check as well, because the interview cut out a little bit, what was the place you saw gigs in Sheffield?

Helen Stead 03:52

Lincoln, I was in Lincoln. Lincoln's are... I used to going down to the Engine Shed. The old comedy club, and I can't remember what it was called because it shut down after my first year. So back in 2005, I can't remember that now.

Richard Minkley 04:08

Okay.

Helen Stead 04:09

In fact, I still have the flyer from the original gigs hanging up in my wall as a constant reminder.

Richard Minkley 04:14

Really?

Helen Stead 04:15

I can reach. There you go. So that's my first gig that I ever went to.

Richard Minkley 04:20

Having been a gaff at the Engine Shed. Best stand up.

Helen Stead 04:24

You're having a giraffe.

Richard Minkley 04:25

You're having a giraffe. Oh, yeah. Oh, that's showing up-

Helen Stead 04:30

Hang on, there you go.

Richard Minkley 04:31

Every Tuesday. How much are the-? How much does it say the tickets are?

Helen Stead 04:38

Five pounds.

Richard Minkley 04:39

Five pounds. That's not bad.

Helen Stead 04:41

Five pounds. I keep that in the office as a constant reminder.

Richard Minkley 04:46

That was the first one you saw, the first one-

Helen Stead 04:48

That's been there since, well... That's the first comedy I saw, I think that was stand up. And first improv would have been the Comedy Store Players.

Richard Minkley 04:57

So this is interesting. You were looking for something to do, people to meet, as you described it, and you went to improv. Why did you-? This is quite a specific, awkward question. But there's a lot of people who would come to improv like your friends Rachel and Felicity, who would then maybe not come so much. I believe you stuck around for a little bit longer. What made you stick around?

Helen Stead 05:25

Five years?

Richard Minkley 05:26

Five years? Well, it's a little bit longer than one or two, isn't it? What made you stick around? Or at least in that initial stage? Why weren't you sort of done with the first one?

Helen Stead 05:37

I just, I enjoyed it. It was a laugh. It felt comfortable and safe with everyone there. It was a good group of people and it was just good fun. And it really got a spark going in comedy, which is a nice time. To point I even, when I- in 2008 is the financial crash so getting into jobs is incredibly hard. So eventually, I eventually got a part time job at the cinema. And I made sure they always made Thursdays as my free night. So I never ever work on the Thursday. So I would always go to improv. So I've got that put in my contract.

Richard Minkley 06:12

Oh, very nice. Okay. And this is... So, they were still doing things on a Thursday because...

Helen Stead 06:20

Thursday.

Richard Minkley 06:21

My understanding is that it was mainly the jams and stuff happening on a Thursday. Did you go to a jam or was it a show, or...? You said you got-

Helen Stead 06:30

They didn't do shows at that point. It was just all the jams and having good fun. I think it was within my first year they started to put on the shows, I think on a Friday. So I obviously then started getting involved in the shows. I think I'd started with the video camera and filmed some of them, and take photos and just get involved.

Richard Minkley 06:51

For the record as someone who's doing history, thank you for filming it. You are a godsend.

Helen Stead 06:58

I am a media productions- Well, I was a media production student, I'm a media productions graduate, and very historically interested as well.

Richard Minkley 07:06

You'll never guess this, but me too!

Helen Stead 07:08

So I'm big into history. Really?

Richard Minkley 07:10

Oh, yeah. See, it's almost as if the podcast and the history project- Anyway.

Helen Stead 07:15

They're my two main things, so when you said history, I was like, "Yeah! What can I do?"

Richard Minkley 07:20

Oh, great. This is gonna be wonderful. So that's interesting, then because you're in 2008. You've gone there, you... The Art Organisation. What..? So- Sorry, my brains got like four questions, and it's trying to pick which one it wants to go, instead of squishing them all into one horrible question. Do you remember the kind of people that you met there or whether there was anybody particular either running it or anybody you met in particular there?

Helen Stead 08:00

I remember Geoff was there, I think, Nick and Marylin.

Richard Minkley 08:05

Yeah.

Helen Stead 08:07

David, he was there as well, David MacCulloch, and I think Rupert was probably there and Ross, i'm sure there'd be others, probably Carla. On the first session there probably would be others, but I couldn't tell you exactly who.

Richard Minkley 08:25

Two names I just want to check there, if that's okay. Carla. Every time I hear that name, I think of the Carla from the Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy, which is not the right Carla. What was Carla's-? Do you remember Carla's surname?

08:39

Carla Presswhich.

Richard Minkley 08:40

Presswhich, I'm going to write that down.

Helen Stead 08:42

Yes.

Richard Minkley 08:44

And there was another one, it was David someone? McCollough?

Helen Stead 08:49

David Ferland McCollough.

Richard Minkley 08:51

Fantastic.

Helen Stead 08:52

He's gone back to Canada now, so he lives over there again. I think he's, I think I remember rightly, David started on same day or maybe the week before me, so he was also very new to it on the same time.

Richard Minkley 09:03

Oh, that's interesting.

Helen Stead 09:04

You'd see David in a lot of shows in the early days because he was particularly good at improv, I think he had a lot of experience. So he brought over the Canadian influence. Yeah, he's a great improviser.

Richard Minkley 09:16

So, that's interesting, because one of the things I'm interested in, is this difference between, as I said before, like people who kind of can turn up, have a good time, maybe go to a course and then move away, and kind of the people who stick around and sort of... I was gonna say, float around in it, but that's a very strange turn of phrase. What- Was there a moment where you... It went from being a comedy activity to something a little bit different that you kind of floated around it? Because I know you- Obviously you run the Nottingham Comedy Festival or founded it and you lead the team that do it. Was that something in your mind when you were trying to have a go at improv? Or is that way off?

Helen Stead 10:08

At that point, I hadn't even thought of the comedy festival. I thought of the comedy festival in about June in 2009. So I'd been doing improv for a short while and I could see the talent that Nottingham had. And I was wondering why no one was celebrating that, and why it wasn't getting what I felt it deserved. And especially going out to London and chatting to Lee Simpson, the Comedy Store Players, I was like this needs to be celebrated. Stand up and improv, comedy isn't just stand up. So me and Rachel went, "Well, why don't we just do a comedy festival? We've got nothing to lose." This was in the June and with Rachel Greensmith. She's a co-founder of the comedy festival. So we just went-

Richard Minkley 10:54

So the person who came with you to improv also helped you set up the comedy festival?

Helen Stead 10:59

Yes. I think she only came to about one or two sessions and then dropped out. I think she came to some of the social things every now and again, and you know, we just thought, "We've got nothing to lose, let's do it. Let's celebrate what Nottingham has to offer."

Richard Minkley 11:11

Yeah, that's interesting. So you were saying how... And I read this on your description of the comedy festival-

Alfie the dog 11:21

Woof woof. Woof

Richard Minkley 11:21

Where's the dog?!

Helen Stead 11:22

Sorry

Richard Minkley 11:22

For history sake, what was the name of your dog?

Helen Stead 11:28

It's Alfie.

Richard Minkley 11:29

Alfie, the... Is it the Labradoodle?

Helen Stead 11:32

He's a miniature Labradoodle.

Richard Minkley 11:34

Amazing! But yeah, you were just describing how you... In this period of time, somewhere between 2008 and 2009, I've seen it described that you had this experience where you went to London, saw this stuff there, thought about what was happening in Nottingham, and as you just described, you wanted to celebrate it and do stuff about it. I'm interested in digging into that a little bit. Like, what did you see..? In fact, part of what I'm doing is trying to figure out the chronology. So was it that you were

doing stuff in Nottingham, and then you thought, "hey, let's see what's happening in London?" Or were you more familiar with what was happening in London first?

Helen Stead 12:21

Well, at the time going to London was quite cheap, you could get cheap train tickets and hotels. And I just really loved going to the Comedy Store Players to see what they had to do. And I got to see just how big and well they were doing, as well. And then I come back to Nottingham, even though it was just having jams and having fun session, I could see loads of talent there and thought, "Why is no...? No one's celebrating? Or giving people a platform to do it." And I wanted to be part of that, to help people in improv, in sketch, in every form of comedy.

Richard Minkley 12:55

Yeah.

Helen Stead 12:55

So I went-

Richard Minkley 12:57

Sorry, carry on.

Helen Stead 12:58

Let's do it. I'd say that was it, I'd say, just, let's just do it.

Richard Minkley 13:01

Yeah. So, okay, let's... You were talking about how it wasn't just stand- It wasn't just Missimp. Was there a wider comedy scene in Nottingham at that time?

Helen Stead 13:18

There was wider in standup, but apart from that, there wasn't really much else going, and I just felt like there probably was things, but people didn't have the platform to showcase it. So I think at the time there was Jongleurs, and just the Tonic going, and I think Spikey Mike was running funhouse comedy as well. And that was it. There was no Glee club. None of that. I was like, "Nottingham's such a great city." I mean, I'm very proudly from the city and I wanted to have this as a good point to showcase what there is. So yeah, after chatting- Well, me and Rachel came with the idea, got talking. We even spoke to Lee at the Comedy Store and he's like, "Nottingham is a great city! Yeah, absolutely go for it."

Richard Minkley 14:04

There's two names that are very-

Helen Stead 14:05

And here we are today.

Richard Minkley 14:06

Yeah. It's fantastic, apart from the pandemic, but-

Helen Stead 14:11

Of course.

Richard Minkley 14:13

There's two names I'm interested in there. Was it Spikey Mike you said?

Helen Stead 14:19

Spikey Mike.

Richard Minkley 14:20

Who's Spikey Mike? He sounds amazing.

Helen Stead 14:24

Mike, he runs Front House comedy which is stand up comedy shows, so he does them all over the country. A bit like what we've got- We later went on to do as well, basically, you can run comedy show in pubs, clubs. I think he might have went to an improv show once maybe, but many years before I did.

Richard Minkley 14:45

Okay.

Helen Stead 14:46

Yeah, he is purely stand up.

Richard Minkley 14:48

Okay.

Helen Stead 14:48

He's a great guy, though.

Richard Minkley 14:50

Amazing. So was he like a promoter in the time, he would set up the gigs and say, "Hey, everybody come to this amazing gig."

Helen Stead 14:58

Yeah, he's the comedy promoter. And again, when we set up the festival, we did go to him and said, "Do you want to get involved," and he jumped on it and he helped us in the first couple years getting shows going on as well.

Richard Minkley 15:11

Fantastic. And the other person you spoke to was Lee Simpson.

Helen Stead 15:15

Lee Simpson from the Comedy Store Players.

Richard Minkley 15:17

Who's Lee Simpson? Tell me more about Lee Simpson, I haven't heard this name before.

Helen Stead 15:21

Lee-

Richard Minkley 15:22

I do know the Comedy Store Players.

Helen Stead 15:23

Lee is... Yeah, Lee is one of the main Comedy Store Players, so with Paul Merton, and Andy Smart, Richard Vranich, and that lot. So he's one of those guys, and we just went to the Store, we got chatting to them. He's such a nice approachable guy. And I don't know if it's stupid or wise or what, but we just went, "lets talk to Lee!", and we said, "would you give us a bit support and advice, a little bit?" and he went, "Yeah, of course I will." He's a lovely guy. He's lovely. And he does a lot for the arts, and celebrating it.

Richard Minkley 15:56

That's interesting. So Lee Simpson... I'm trying to picture this in my head at the minute, it seems really... Because obviously the Comedy Store Players are... In the UK, they're practically the kind of first real team that you can think of, that wasn't some sort of proto improv team. Did you just wander into..? Did you just, after the gig, people were just about and you could chat with them? Or did you have to kind of knock on a dressing room or something?

Helen Stead 16:26

Pretty much. In the Store- in London, especially just between Piccadilly Circus Leicester Square, and it's just a door and you have to go in, and you go downstairs, and there's the bar and the room, and the green room for the acts were just behind the stage. So everyone had to come in and out the same door. So at the end of the show, people just milled around to just chat and then the guys would come out. And sometimes just say hello, like I remember meeting Paul Merton. [Just came up], Hello, nice to meet you. Then off he went. And some likely you'd have another chat with him. And that's what we did, just had a chat with him, explained who we are, asked if he doesn't mind we can have his email address. And he said, Yep, we just communicated just a little bit, in the beginning. But it gave us the confidence and the support in the beginning.

Richard Minkley 17:14

Fantastic. Well, that's fascinating. I'm aware that I'm doing a history of Missimp, specifically, but also it branches into the wider Nottingham community. That is going to inevitably fall into doing stuff about the comedy festival as well. Did there anything-? Is there anything-? Do you remember anything in particular, about your time at Missimp, before this kind of night at the Comedy Store where you and Rachel- Well, I'm assuming Rachel was there just to speak to Lee Simpson?

Helen Stead 17:52

Yeah, Rachel was down when- She was pretty much with me all the times I went down to the Store.

Richard Minkley 17:56

Amazing. So I'm assuming that- Was there anything between that night talking to Lee Simpson and when you first turned up, is there anything in particular that happened there? Or was it just a steady stream of Hey, let's go down there on a Thursday.

Helen Stead 18:10

It's just such a steady stream. I remember just go along to improv, having a laugh, enjoying it, and then we started doing shows, and encouraging friends and family to come along. And it was just good fun.

Richard Minkley 18:24

What do you remember of those shows? Like, was it a particular kind of show? Was there a particular premise to it or anything?

Helen Stead 18:31

It all started at the Art Organisation. I think it was on a Friday night downstairs, and remember, we all have to get in early and help build the stage and put the chairs out. It was one of these places we had to take your own drinks with you. And it was just light hearted and no, nothing serious. We had a list of games. To start with, it was whoever wants to play could play. The first few times I don't think I did, because I was nervous and eventually I built the confidence up to the join in the games, and so I normally hid behind the video camera, and went "can I just film it instead?" So I did that. And it was just nice watching your friends have fun on stage and watch everyone else enjoying it and laughing along.

Richard Minkley 19:18

So was that your first performance for comedy, was a Missimp show? As in you performing?

Helen Stead 19:24

Yeah, I've never performed comedy apart from at Missimp. I've never had the confidence. It's something I get asked, regularly, and I've never performed standup, but I did used to do improv.

Richard Minkley 19:35

That's interesting. So... I've got to ask, then, what was it like, then, going from... You said you were a bit shy of getting on the stage, and you were sticking with your camera, and that you were doing a media degree, so I can see the camera skills come with that. What was it like making the jump and going on the stage?

Helen Stead 19:56

It was a bit nerve wracking, but at the same time, it's just... Every time you performed, it was just watching your friends have a laugh and enjoy themselves. And I wanted to enjoy myself and have fun too, and it didn't feel, you know, it was a show. It didn't feel like it was a formal show where... It was just a laugh with your friends. And it just goes wrong, it's improv, it doesn't matter. But I'm always more comfortable behind the camera.

Richard Minkley 20:23

It's interesting, you described it as a different... Like you said, it wasn't a formal show, which is an interesting way to describe it. It's like a... Formal for comedy sake, I'm imagining, would that be fair to say?

Helen Stead 20:36

Yeah, I mean, it was a formal show. It was a proper show. But it felt like it was just a friend. It was a laugh and light hearted and nothing serious. Any money that was made was basically put back into the group to help the group continue, as opposed to let's say a professional gigs and shows now where you pay the money that goes into the company. It wasn't, it was just given to support the group to

continue. It was a community show sort of atmosphere. Just good fun. Obviously that changed later on, but at that stage it was like that.

Richard Minkley 21:08

Did it-? And did you when you were there, could you-? Did it feel like a community? Or did it feel like-

Helen Stead 21:15

Oh, yeah, absolutely. It was a community. Missimp was a community. Every Thursday, I wanted to go in to see my friends, see how everyone was doing. If anyone had had a bad day, everyone was there to pick them up and help and support, and it was a very supportive group at the time.

Richard Minkley 21:29

Fantastic. Okay, so, and I can see then, is it that kind of, after that period, you build up this sense of no one's showcasing what's happening in Nottingham? I'm imagining then, because I know that the first comedy festival was in 2009, I believe, is that right?

Helen Stead 21:53

Yes, it was. Yeah, that's correct.

Richard Minkley 21:55

Ha! I did some research. Yes. Yeah.

Helen Stead 21:59

It was the end of October to... I can't see where the flyer went. 30th October to the 7th November. There you go.

Richard Minkley 22:08

I'm gonna have to just ask you to take a picture of the wall in front of you, just because clearly all of the history of Nottingham comedy is in front of you apparently.

Helen Stead 22:19

There's lots in front of me right now. I always have the first flyer there, I have always got my regular pound night shows, and my originally Lincoln flyer, all on the board so I can always see them as a memory from where I came from.

Richard Minkley 22:34

Did you say that your original panel shows?

Helen Stead 22:37

Pound night shows.

Richard Minkley 22:38

Oh, pound night, okay yeah.

Helen Stead 22:39

Something I came to much later. But that's literally all for when I'm advertising. But out of date now though, because of what's going on right now, but never mind We'll sort this years dates.

Richard Minkley 22:54

Yeah. So I'm trying to kind of dig into it, did Missimp... I assume Missimp was involved with the Nottingham comedy festival?

Helen Stead 23:04

Absolutely, we told the guys pretty early on. And they straight away went, "we'll get behind you. We'll do whatever we can." And so I think they did two shows, I think they did a Halloween special on the Friday, on the... Was it Friday or Saturday, can't remember now. And they did one to close the festival as well at the end. And it was great. I remember at the end of the show, they even brought flowers out to say thank you, and it was just nice, and that's what I wanted. I wanted to show comedy is about the big stand up, but it's also about the improv, and it's about the local community as well.

Richard Minkley 23:38

They brought you flowers!

Helen Stead 23:40

So they bought me flowers, which was lovely. It's the only bunch of flowers I've ever been given from the guys from Missimp.

Richard Minkley 23:47

What was that like? Because that is a really... We've been talking for about 20 minutes and that's sounds... That sounds like a fascinating moment because you know, you're talking about comedy and community and that there, it seems like a hell of a journey to go from, "I don't know, I'm looking for something to do. Oh, let's try improv." And now they're giving you flowers for the festivals!

Helen Stead 24:10

It's a little bit...

Richard Minkley 24:11

What was that like?

Helen Stead 24:12

Little bit crazy. It's quite overwhelming, a bit crazy. We were two 21 year olds at the time, 21, 22. And we just went "we've got a crazy idea!". And it did come out of nowhere, and looking back now, it's mental. Yeah, but we did it. And we wouldn't have done it without everyone's support, and Missimp, we're glad to be part of that at the time. And it was just lovely. It was just really nice.

Richard Minkley 24:39

That's a beautiful moment, but at the same time, the Nottingham Comedy Festival wasn't Missimp. They were kind of- although they were kind of in the same community, they were separate organizations.

Helen Stead 24:52

They were separate.

Richard Minkley 24:53

So... What was it like? I don't know how to describe it. But was it like having your feet in two different boats? Or did you feel like you were swinging out of the community a bit and then back in? How did it feel working both in and outside the community, if that's a way to describe it?

Helen Stead 25:19

At that point, it was a bit of both, I was very much Missimp. But I was also starting a new adventure with the festival, and I was able to combine two at the time. Later on, it came a bit harder, at a point I kind of went, "I'm going to have to leave to focus." But that was literally about four or five years later, but in back in 2009, it was... I was Missimp, but I was also the comedy festival and I had the support of Missimp behind me, and encouragement from my friends and family which includes those guys which pushed me for it.

Richard Minkley 25:54

Fantastic! So, it's interesting, what was the wider comic scene like? Because I'm aware that comedy was... There's kind of peaks and troughs, it can change in the city. I may have even written down the date, because there was a period where comedy clubs started going out of business, I think it might be 2000-... This is much later on. I've written down the dates here like between 2000-2017, places like Jongleurs were kind of going in and out of business and being moved around. What was the state of the comedy venues in Nottingham? Let's say, before we move on, around the time of the first festival?

Helen Stead 26:41

Oh, the first festival, there was Mike from Funhouse comedy, and so he was doing shows in little pubs and clubs around the area. There was still Jongleurs back in the day, and it was just a tonic but just a tonic wouldn't get involved in the festival. They have their personal reasons, which is absolutely fine.

Richard Minkley 27:02

Fair enough. So was that- So jongleurs was-

Helen Stead 27:09

That was pretty much I think, really?

Richard Minkley 27:11

I know jongleurs was like a physical place. It was a building.

Helen Stead 27:14

Yes.

Richard Minkley 27:15

Was just a tonic a building, or was it also doing venues swapping, switching?

Helen Stead 27:21

It was in one building. It wasn't a purpose built comedy club like Jongleurs was, but they made it into like, a pop up venue. So later on, moved to a place in the Cornerhouse. And it was just a tonic, which I think later, in the evenings was the nightclub, so they kind of shared the space, but it was built for that reason as well. And then in 2010, The Glee Club arrived as the Jongleurs disappeared and the Glee guys came and Jongleurs came back, then everybody was there, and now Jongleurs has gone again.

Richard Minkley 27:54

Yeah, that's interesting. So at that time of the first Comedy Festival, how... For the festival itself, how many of the actual gigs were in a comedy building? And how many of them were like repurposing function rooms and pub rooms and things like that? Was it like a-? I'm not expecting you to detail all of the list, but like what was the split? Roughly?

Helen Stead 28:24

I think that's pretty much it. Jongleurs is purpose built, Just A Tonic had their known location. And then it was just Mike doing various venues and pubs and clubs and things like that.

Richard Minkley 28:35

It was it fairly evenly, like a three way split, or-?

Helen Stead 28:38

Yeah, it wasn't really it... Yeah, pretty much that was... I'm trying to think back. It was a while ago now.

Richard Minkley 28:44

That's okay. That's okay. That's interesting.

Helen Stead 28:47

Of course, Jongleurs used to be where The Glee Club now is.

Richard Minkley 28:53

Oh, really?

Helen Stead 28:54

That is the old Jongleurs club. And then in 2009 when the festival began, I think is when the Jongleurs shut down. And I think it was like a week or two before the festival if I remember rightly. And then later on they rebuilt up at Thurland Street.

Richard Minkley 29:09

Wow. What- Okay, hang on a minute.

Helen Stead 29:12

I could be slightly wrong on the dates.

Richard Minkley 29:15

What was it like hearing that-? Because obviously you were getting involved in this comedy scene. What was it like getting involved and then the comedy venue shut down in the city?

Helen Stead 29:28

I'm so used to that now, it's kind of hard to think back to it was like originally when it first happened. I'm so used to problems and things going on now. It was probably stressful for couple of minutes. But there's not much you can do about it. So you carry on, don't you?

Richard Minkley 29:43

Yeah, well, clearly. I mean, we're still here, and the comedy festival is still kicking, so yeah. Um, so what happened-? So what was it like then, going- After the comedy festival in 2009, did you just go back to being... Dipping into Missimp and doing improv or was-?

Helen Stead 30:07

I kept going to Missimp. I did Missimp every single week without fail. I was always at Missimp. And I just got on planning for next year's festival. Alright, let's do it again. I think Rachel left by this point of the festival. And I went well, I'm carrying on. So I carried on, and still did Missimp, still trying to get into the media industry at the same time. Because obviously I'm very passionate, big passion of mine as well.

Richard Minkley 30:37

Sorry, my phone just went off, should not be going off! Silence! Well, that's interesting. So in that year, then, because the next thing that I know is on the horizon is The Glee Club coming into town, did anything happen Missimp-wise before then, or did you kind of just slide into doing improv. I'm sorry, that question made no sense. My brain was all over the place. Sorry. So yeah, was it then basically, do you remember anything happening before the Glee Club rumbling along?

Helen Stead 31:15

I remember with Missimp, we carried on and the shows became a regular occurrence. So it was without fail as a show. I think Nick used to name the show each month as well. And they just got bigger and bigger. It was really nice. Wasn't just the Missimp community, it was a Missimp audience community joined in. So we've got an extended group there. And then that was really, it was just really nice. Like, even the audience members became part of the community. And it was lovely. It was great.

Richard Minkley 31:43

Fascinating. Why do you-? Do you have a... Do you think there's a particular reason why that growth happened around Missimp? Because it's an extraordinary thing to think about, like that... I mean, yeah, a comedy success story is kind of an extraordinary thing quite often. Why do you think Missimp managed to grow their audience like that?

Helen Stead 32:04

It was just, it was something a bit different, and Nottingham had not really been aware of and it just people enjoyed it, and it was just good fun and you could see everyone performing on stage were having a laugh and enjoying themselves. And if you're the person on stage enjoying themselves, the audience enjoy themselves, and just became a nice general atmosphere.

Richard Minkley 32:23

That's fascinating. So when did things around the Glee club appear? Like do you remember when the idea first appeared that there may be a Glee Club?

Helen Stead 32:35

I do remember the Glee Club, I can't tell you without checking emails and looking back on historic records there, when it was exactly, but I probably have got it somewhere. But I remember getting an email from Mark Tughan who's the owner of Glee. He went, "We're thinking of coming to Nottingham, opening a new comedy club at the old Jongleur site. We want to get to know the local comedy scene and what's going on and want to know who's here. Can we have a meeting?" So I went, "of course." So I sat down with Mark and... Oh, I can't remember who else it was. Somebody else, now I've forgotten who it was, was that day but definitely Mark, and we just had a chat about the comedy scene and he was very keen on obviously bringing the big names to Nottingham, but he also wanted to support the local community and the local Nottingham people. So he was asking me who was in the

area and so I got talking about Missimp because I was a very big member, big Missimp to me, I should say was a big part. And I was always there, so I went "well, Missimp. They're local. They're Nottingham, they have a good following. What about these guys?". So obviously I put everybody in touch.

Richard Minkley 33:44

That's fascinating. What's it like being someone... You describe yourself as trying to get into the media industry? What's it like the head of a comedy gig calling you up to try and set up a comedy venue?

Helen Stead 34:00

It was odd. I mean, I've never really had too much confidence in myself and what I do anyway. And so it had happened, I was a bit, Oh, okay. Let's see how this goes! But it was really lovely at the same time, it's nice. It's an honor, for to someone to go, I want to speak to you and have a chat with you about it.

Richard Minkley 34:18

Yeah. When you say someone else was there, was-

Helen Stead 34:21

[...] Pardon?

Richard Minkley 34:24

When you were- You said you had a meeting with Mark, and there was someone else? Was it someone with Mark or was it someone from Nottingham?

Helen Stead 34:34

Someone from Glee. And I can't remember if Rachel still with us at this point, or whether she'd just left. So I probably would have took someone with me as a bit of a moral support. So definitely, it was definitely Mark.

Richard Minkley 34:50

And so did you help Missimp get that first gig then, that first Glee Club gig?

Helen Stead 34:57

Yeah, I put the guys in touch. I think I went to Nick afterwards and said, I've just been speaking to Mark, would this be something you guys would be interested in, and they went absolutely. I did big Missimp up a lot in that meeting to go, look, there's this is Nottingham group. It's something different. It's comedy. Give the guys a chance. So... and it's what Mark wanted as well, he was like, we should be celebrating what goes on the local area. So that's what he wanted as well. So, together, we all work together and got them their first shows at the Glee.

Richard Minkley 35:33

What was that first Glee Club like?

Helen Stead 35:38

I remember it being great. I remember feeling really proud that day of the fact it's the Missimp, or my Missimp friends performing on the Glee Club stage, a purpose built Comedy Club, which was just

stunning. And I still love the Glee, even now, I still love the Glee, it is a great venue. Just such a great team there as well. So it just feels really nice.

Richard Minkley 36:02

Yeah. So what was it like then-? Because I'm aware that there's kind of- We've gone from in the beginning of this interview you were talking about how they just did things on a Thursday night, very much a community feel. Then we added this idea of them doing a regular show. And now they're doing- Was it, they did a performance at the Glee Club, and then a while later they've managed to pick up some more regular shows at the Glee club, or was it like, we are in the opening night, and hey, guess what guys, we're going to be doing every month or every whatever.

Helen Stead 36:34

And I can't remember exactly what happened at that point. Because I think there was a Missimp group as well, workshop going on earlier in the week, which then all combined into the Thursday group. And I know they've had the art organization, and then they get to start doing the regular Glee shows once a month, at the Glee, I can't remember if they were doing other shows at the same time. It was a bit of a hectic time back then, so I can't really remember.

Richard Minkley 37:03

That's interesting. So it did- Did it feel more-? Well, I suppose as you said, did it feel more hectic? Like did it feel like there was something changing in the community feel of it?

Helen Stead 37:17

Missimp felt like it was going to the next level and the next stages. They absolutely deserve to get to next level, and getting the credit, the credit they deserved. And it was amazing to see. I think for me, the festival was getting more hectic, it was getting bigger, and it kept getting bigger and obviously more things, because we're going to life. So yeah, just life because hectic.

Richard Minkley 37:39

I'm sure. That's interesting. So... I'm trying to think, because we're in about 2010, October 2010 was when the Glee club opened. Do you remember Nottingham's community or- Not the community of Missimp in particular, but the landscape changed by The Glee Club coming into the area. Obviously, you had Glee Club come in, but was there any broader effect beyond the Glee Club?

Helen Stead 38:15

Places kept gradually improving and [getting more community], i remember, I'm sure Mike ended up doing some gong shows at the Glee Club as well. So they were very much trying to get Nottingham people into the venue. And yeah, it was just a gradual progression there.

Richard Minkley 38:31

Sorry, the interview broke up a little bit there. Did you say Mike got you doing some dog shows?

Helen Stead 38:37

Mike, Spikey Mike, who I mentioned earlier, yeah. And he runs what they call a Gong Show. So new acts, open spots, going on stage and getting gonged off if they're not very good. So he started doing shows at the Glee as well. So it was quite a big deal. I think at that point, you're trying to... Almost be a bit of a hub to get people in Nottingham just going, and if you look at it today, there's a big scene in Nottingham, and there's lots of new acts in every sector of comedy, and it's... Yeah, it's really

changed. I think it was probably quite a gradual change. It's just when you look back now, you see how the industry is now in Nottingham, as opposed to 10, 11 years ago.

Richard Minkley 39:20

I'm gonna have to pick up on that as well because I'm very interested, a Gong Show, was this a literal gong? Like, a bang when they're done with you?

Helen Stead 39:31

That's how they do it in some Gong shows. But Mike, the way he does it, he picks some people in the audience, and they have to hold like a red light basically. And after a couple of minutes, he brings like a little bell or little Gong, is everyone happy to continue green or red? Green, they can carry on, red gong off. And if more people say, no, they're off, next person, and then there's an ultimate winner at the end of the show. They're good fun, they're good shows.

Richard Minkley 39:56

That's that is an interesting format. I like it with the little green things as well, that's cool.

Helen Stead 40:01

It's nice format. It's nice. I've never done it. Obviously, Mike's expert on that. So I've left him to that.

Richard Minkley 40:08

Fantastic. Okay. So you described your experience in about five years, between 2008, and... Well, if it's 2008? And you said about five years it's 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13? Is that roughly sound about right?

Helen Stead 40:25

Yeah. It'd be around about probably late 2013. I couldn't really say, I knew it was about four or five years.

Richard Minkley 40:35

Because we are conveniently coming to just the end of the first chunk of our interview and about the middle point of those five years. I'm interested, because looking at the dates, it seems that Missimp was at The Glee Club for quite a while. Do you have a rough estimate of how long they were performing at the Glee club regularly?

Helen Stead 40:58

I'm not sure to be honest, because I think it was part of that time when I started dropping out a little bit. My comedy work was getting busier. And I've started to struggle to balance the two. So I'm not really sure when it all started going up. Nick will probably have a good idea I reckon on that one.

Richard Minkley 41:18

Okay. So I suppose that this is a decent part to end it then. So just to kind of have a bit of a recap. From that point you've had your first... In fact, if it's 2000- No, if the festivals in October, in November, so you're about to have your second festival or your third festival. And you-

Helen Stead 41:42

The festival did change. It moved a couple of months earlier for a while. I'll have to double check when it changed, because we had it October November, then we moved it to September, and we pushed it

back again to November a couple years later. I'll find out in a few minutes. I've got all the records up the top.

Richard Minkley 41:58

And also so the people on the audio can know, she did point to the wall. So it's probably on some sort of- I'm imagining a massive collage. But that's a different point. So looking back over those first couple of years, it sounds like you've had a good time. I'm not necessarily- Well, I do care if you've had a good time with it or not. But how would you describe that first couple of years building up both improv, experience, festivals-?

Helen Stead 42:26

Oh, I loved it.

Richard Minkley 42:27

Yeah?

Helen Stead 42:29

I absolutely loved it. There's no doubt about it. The first few years, they became like a second family. I just enjoyed spending time with buddy, it was just like having fun, forgetting any problems you had in the week, you just go Thursday. If you're having a bad day, it doesn't matter. You can just sit down on the sofas and just watch everyone have a laugh and play the games and then go to the pub after, and another week, just join in, and it was- Yeah, it was a great time. I do miss those fun days.

Richard Minkley 42:59

This is one of the things I'm interested in though, because at the same time, you've got this parallel thing building, which is, I don't know whether you want to call it ambition or a career or something. There's like a... I was gonna say business, but it feels more to put it like as an organization, there is this event, there is this role that you are building for yourself. What was it like seeing that build? And you know, by The Glee Club, what was it like having all of that? It's almost as if, like, what's it like having all that on your CV? You know, you've built this kind of reputation for yourself.

Helen Stead 43:38

I can't quite believe it now. Even we're going to the 12th Festival now and even now, it still seems quite surreal, to be fair. It's a... Yeah, they're just... They just start off as having a good time with your friends and it's just gotten to being literally my career now. That's my business, of the comedy festival. Even if I'm not part of Missimp now, I get to look at them and it's still nice to see how well they're all doing.

Richard Minkley 44:06

Oh good. Um, is there anything else you want to say about that kind of first half of your experience with Missimp, or anything that maybe I just haven't asked about or that you think's relevant or important or anything like that?

Helen Stead 44:20

I can't think of anything at the moment, but, you never know in a short while, I might suddenly remember something else.

Richard Minkley 44:24

No, wonderful. Well, in that case, I'm going to stop recording and then we're just gonna have a quick break and come back in a sec. So I'm going to-

b) Part 2 of 3

22nd June 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

remember, gigs, glee, comedy, festival, improv, interested, Nottingham, people, community, point, comedy festival, hour, standup, started, support, moving, Geoff, part, glee club

SPEAKERS

Helen Stead, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

-hit record here. Fantastic. So it is 11:30 on the dot, 22nd of June 2020. Richard Minkley interviewing Helen Stead for the Missimp oral history project, and this is the second interview. Okay, so we were talking in the break and you mentioned the 24 hour improv thing, was that quite a big event for people?

Helen Stead 00:30

Yeah, I remember that one just being... I can't remember exactly how it came about, I had a crazy idea. I think we were trying to raise money for something.

Richard Minkley 00:41

"I had a crazy idea" is the best way to start a story.

Helen Stead 00:46

Well, we were trying to raise some money and I just went "what does everyone think to doing this, it's a bit crazy, but what do you reckon?" and they all went, "let's do it." So we did.

Richard Minkley 00:58

You remember what you were-

Helen Stead 00:58

It seems to be a quite common thing for me. Just-

Richard Minkley 01:02

You remember what you were raising money for?

Helen Stead 01:03

It might have been where we're trying to raise money to take Lloydie's play to Edinburgh. That might have been the reason. Because I was very keen of supporting local talent and obviously he'd been a Missimp member as well. We just went, "I'm sure the Missimp guys will, we can all work together" and

I'm pretty sure that's what we were doing. And a lot of the Missimp-ers were a part of the show as well. And we just all did it. It was a crazy 24 hours in one building. It was a good one.

Richard Minkley 01:40

I'm gonna have to ask as well. What happened? Obviously you don't need to do a 24 hour blow-by-blow, but what was that 24 hours like?

Helen Stead 01:51

I remember we set up the downstairs, again there was the sofas from upstairs which we used to crash on, they were downstairs and had loads of rows and rows. And the guys basically did a plan of an hour to hour of what is going to happen when, all the shows and who was going to take parts, we all had our time slots. Upstairs, in the room we used to jam in, I remember being the table with snacks, food and snacks on, and lots of sleeping bags. So we'd go upstairs to try and crash and sleep or rest for a bit, have a bit of quiet time. And then there's lots of photos of quite a lot of us on the sofas in the front row, just half asleep, trying to support each other in the early hours.

Richard Minkley 02:34

That's an awful way to support someone. You don't sleep through their gig in solidarity!

Helen Stead 02:40

More like, "we're here! We're trying to stay awake." It was just a bit of madness. There are some great photos. It was good fun, there was the chance to do some experimental improv, things that hadn't really been done before. And then do the good old favorites as well. I remember it being exhausting.

Richard Minkley 03:00

What counted as experimental improv then? I know obviously this is a particular day. But this brings up a broader question of like, what improv was Missimp doing, and what counted as something edgy and new?

Helen Stead 03:14

I'm trying to remember now, what it was. I must have the 24 hour time sheet somewhere. I could give you the answers, but- Probably. There was a plan, it was a proper timetable. Might be on an email, I'll have to try and dig it out. It'll be somewhere, I can't really remember exactly. I just remember them going, "here's some experimental stuff, things you've never done before!" Probably- some of them probably do it all the time, now. It's probably normal, but then it was quite new, and exciting. I remember musical being quite new at that point. They hadn't really done much musical improv.

Richard Minkley 03:21

I was going to say, you said there was a plan, and I'm like, if it was written down, Nick probably has it in a box. But... Really? That's very interesting.

Helen Stead 03:58

That was starting to come in? It's all a bit vague. I know Lloydie in particular was getting very into all the different types of improv. I think he was very influential at that point trying to bring a lot of different styles in.

Richard Minkley 04:12

And do you remember roughly when this was, because if you're going chronologically in our conversation, we're in about 2011. But this is after we've started at the Glee Club-

Helen Stead 04:24

It could around then, it'd be 2010 and 2011. I know I've got it in one of my files.

Richard Minkley 04:33

Don't worry, I've also got stacks of information and stuff. So don't worry if you can't remember specific details, but-

04:38

I could probably dig it out, but I can't remember off the top of my head, I reckon it was about nine or 10 years ago now.

Richard Minkley 04:43

See, again, we're coming into this very interesting thing where there is a... I don't know, I don't know whether to call it a dichotomy, or... These two sides of, you're describing everything as, hey, we're all going around, we're just having a good time with our friends, but at the same time, there's people like you setting up a festival, Lloydie writing a play and taking it to Edinburgh. There's a lot of ambitious things going on in the community.

Helen Stead 05:12

It's a very ambitious group. Very ambitious group, a lot of creative and very talented people. And I think it was giving them the confidence, this kind of maybe, to have a go and do things, because it was such a supportive group. Like, people like me come along, I've got an idea and everyone's going, "do it! Come on, you can do it, it'll be great." and it gave me the confidence to go ahead with it.

Richard Minkley 05:32

Was that something that you felt was there when you first turned up, were there people being-

Helen Stead 05:36

Oh yeah.

Richard Minkley 05:37

Yeah? Oh, that's interesting.

Helen Stead 05:38

They were very supportive, and very... Any idea, it doesn't matter if it sounds stupid, just throw it out there, and see what people thought.

Richard Minkley 05:47

So they were supportive, but was there other things happening 2008 where, you know, people were putting on plays or festivals or things independent of Missimp?

Helen Stead 06:00

Yeah, I'm not sure. I remember Geoff doing with his brother some little video shoots every now and again. There were things going off with Geoff and Andy Monk, and helping them to film little sketches. I think Nick was part of those. Yeah, Nick was part of those, actually, as well. So I think they were

doing some little bits on the side anyway, which I remember being on the website, when I first looked at joining them because I remember seeing, oh, they're interested in filming sketches, media background, of course, I was going to be interested in that as well. So, they've always had ideas. And yeah. And then gradually new, more people joined and bought new ideas that kind of just gradually developed.

Richard Minkley 06:44

That's very interesting. Okay, so now I'm gonna zoom out a little bit, because time is precious, and I want to try and make sure I get things in the right way. The things, the big event, really, or big events plural, in my head are you moving away from Missimp, Missimp moving away from The Glee Club, and Missimp no longer being able to use the Art Org. Now I'm trying to understand the kind of process, were they still- When you moved away, were they still doing Glee shows? Were they still doing Art Org shows or was it somewhere else?

Helen Stead 07:31

I think they'd gone away from the art organization, I seem to remember going to a different building. Well, it was connected to the Art Org... I don't know, but it definitely wasn't the Art Organization itself, we had moved by that point.

Richard Minkley 07:47

Do you remember if they were still doing-

Helen Stead 07:49

I can't remember if they were doing shows, but I said at the time when I'll have [...] The Glee shows, not sure. I'm not 100% sure on that one, whether they just stopped. I remember them getting into a bit difficulty with the Glee, I remember the Glee having a quiet word with me a few times, to go in a bit worried about the audience numbers. Because I think there was a point where they're debating what to do with the situation. And I remember trying to have a chat with them, to go look, this is the situation, but it was, it didn't really feel like it was my place at that point, I didn't want to get too much involved. I think there were some new people involved who were that... It was kind of becoming more of a business structure by that point.

Richard Minkley 08:27

Okay. When you say a business structure-

Helen Stead 08:30

I didn't feel like it was my place, at that point, I was like, try and warn quietly, but...

Richard Minkley 08:35

When you said it was a business structure, is that a business structure from you, from the Glee, or from Missimp?

Helen Stead 08:41

More Missimp, at that point, I think they were starting to go "Okay, this is who we are now. We need a plan. We need to get something properly in place here." So things did start changing. I think it's because there was some new members who I think were pushing as well. They came with new ideas and suggestions as well.

Richard Minkley 09:01

So it seems then, the next sort of thing that was happening in your experience- In fact, that's the question, so we're in about 2011, you've got The Glee Club, you've got the festival. What's happening for Helen Stead in that next year or two? Is it still Missimp, festival, Glee Club, or I'm assuming you had a job?

Helen Stead 09:30

I left the cinema, I was working part time, because the hours were all over the place, and I couldn't keep up with it. But I wasn't earning enough money to be able to live properly. So I took a part time job in the local chemist. So I only worked I think, two afternoons and one morning a week, which gave me a bit of steady income, while giving me the time and the money to do what I needed to do. And I set up doing regular shifts, because I realized within year one, I can't just run the festival once a year, I need to get money throughout the rest of the year. So I set up NCF comedy, and started doing little gigs, which were regular gigs and then started doing similar sort of thing that Mike was doing. Doing that at little pubs and clubs. Which is what I still do today. I still go out there with the little shows and have my little- Well, should have my little regular show going on a couple of times a month.

Richard Minkley 10:24

I was gonna say you're probably not doing it today, because for the historical record, we're in the middle- We are just coming to the end of the first period of social distancing. All the shops are beginning to open. And there's a headline this morning of Boris Johnson, some reason it's an old picture of him standing in a playground with children, with his arms out, talking about being able to go one meter away from people you know, so maybe not the best time for a comedy gig, you know, squeezing people into a pub.

Helen Stead 10:53

No, I meant to have one on this Wednesday in fact, and this is my one pound comedy night. For the past three years they've been selling out every single month, to the first one where I've got to cancel it. This is heartbreaking.

Richard Minkley 11:07

Well this month is the first one?

Helen Stead 11:10

This is not the first one should be canceled. The first one would have been back in March. I do them every two weeks. So the next one would have been this Wednesday. It is what it is.

Richard Minkley 11:23

We will dedicate this interview to the spirit of that one night this month. So Nottingham Comedy Festival and NCF are two separate organizations?

Helen Stead 11:37

Technically, they started off as the Comedy Festival. And then I came with the idea of just doing some things regularly, but I wanted to be associated with the festival, which is why I shortened it down to NCF, and NCF kind of took off! So it is almost like two separate, but we come under the same banner of NCF entertainment. So under NCF Entertainment, we have the Nottingham Comedy Festival and we have NCF Comedy. So it is still all me. I just do both. So I'm doing my regular shows, and I still organize the festival.

Richard Minkley 12:10

So I am interested in this actually. So you... Sorry, I'm just trying to make sure which angle I'm going through in this conversation. In fact, yeah, let's not go straight to where we are now. I'll try and build that in at the end. Yeah, so as those gigs started building up, you started building up, you built the comedy festival and you were having these extra gigs and becoming a promoter. Would that- Is that a fair way to describe it, becoming a promoter?

Helen Stead 12:51

Absolutely, yeah. Comedy promoter, I call myself just a comedy organizer as well, as the general...

Richard Minkley 12:58

And this ran alongside doing less stuff with Missimp? I'm very interested. What's it like moving away from Missimp?

Helen Stead 13:11

It was a big step originally because it was such a big part of my life. But when I decided that enough was enough, I needed to move on, it was time. I felt like it was time, if things had happened, and it wasn't the environment that I fell in love with and what I was enjoying, and I needed to go and focus on what I love, well, my business.

Richard Minkley 13:35

Okay. What was the- I'm very interested in comparing Missimp's deeply community feeling... I don't know whether to call it a philosophy, a culture, a style, just its community thing, and the standup world, because my understanding is that there isn't that same kind of community in standup, but then again, I wouldn't know because I'm not a part of it. Is there a community like that in standup? Or is it more-

Helen Stead 14:07

There is. Comedy... Yeah, there is a big community, people do get very supportive of each other, and it's just, we've been standup people all over the country. So it's a lot of scattered. But then there's still a very nice little knot to consider, some fantastic acts. And we do all support each other, where we can, anyway, we do. It's a different type of community, but it's still a good strong community.

Richard Minkley 14:33

If it's okay, I'd be interested to dig into that a little bit, because one of the things I'm very aware of with Missimp is that the place... There is like a material thing where people regularly meet up in a place, physically or maybe digitally at the minute. And that is kind of like the hub of the community where things boil around and happen, suck things in. Is it the same thing for standup in Nottingham specifically, is there like a, an event or thing? Or is it just-

Helen Stead 15:04

Not really, it's just at the gigs, when the gigs are there, you just, everyone just hangs out at the gigs and just chats and goes off again. I think that's one reason Edinburgh is such a big thing in comedy, because it's the one time we're all together. And the festivals can be a bit of a hub as well. But it's not quite the same. It is all scattered and we do have a lot of comedy forums online as well.

Richard Minkley 15:31

So it's like an online like chatting with each other. I'm imagining like-

Helen Stead 15:35

Yeah, there's a lot of that but it's mainly the gigs itself, I'd say, obviously, people are closer to so they might see each other more socially like that, but it's... Yeah, we don't tend to go out like Missimp used too, let's go out for drinks tonight and go to the clubs. That doesn't happen, which used to happen back in the day.

Richard Minkley 15:58

So this is one of the things I'm fascinated about. I don't- I'm aware of certain things that... In fact, I'm just going to, we are 15 minutes in, is it alright if I just pause the recording for one second, because I feel like there's something I just need to double check with you bear with me.

c) Part 3 of 3

22nd June 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Nottingham, people, comedy, glee club, remember, point, group, bit, festival, question, community, midlands, feel, glee, changed, shows, necessarily, left, part, comedy festival

SPEAKERS

Helen Stead, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

I've gotta do maths now to try and remember how long we've done, so if we've done 15 minutes, so we've got half an hour. Cool. Okay. Oh yeah, that works out pretty well. So, it's interesting, because around this time, there is a souring in Missimp generally, I've picked up on that, even just from chatting to people about things. What was happening in the community and, you know, the spaces where Missimp operated, when the Glee had become a thing, they'd done their first show, it had established a bit, you've established yourself a bit, what was it like going on in the community then?

Helen Stead 00:19

A divide started appearing, I noticed, it was very much the people that were allowed to perform, to people that weren't allowed to perform. So originally everyone's allowed to join in and have fun together, it felt like, "you're not good enough, we are. We're on stage you're not." And there was definitely a divide which started appearing. And I remember them starting doing, we're doing registers you must attend for so many sessions before you're allowed to be part of it anymore. Yeah, it started become a bit of an us and them situation, which wasn't the most pleasant, but I think it's just, they are excited and trying to push it to the next level and something needed to be done. I think there were new members joining in, who might have been part of that. And there were also other members who were starting to say things behind other people's backs, not always the truth. And there was a lot underneath the scenes with some backstabbing again, some people who trusted friends, I think, started listening to other people, and gradually over time, became harder. -gradually got-

Richard Minkley 01:58

So one of the things I'm aware of with doing an oral history is that I'm not necessarily trying to piece together each individual's story so I can decide who is and who isn't a douchebag. Because eventually you'll find something to make everyone look like a douchebag, especially me asking the questions, I feel incredibly nosy. But it seems that... Sorry, I'm trying to find the right way to ask this as a historian without putting my opinion on it too much. With the us and them thing, was the divide to do with The Glee Club, because there was also doing the, I don't know whether they were still doing the show at the Art Organisation about 2012 around that stage, but were the people doing the jams, and the gorilla

burger shows one team and then the top end of hierarchy was the Glee club? Or was there a divide at a different point in that spectrum?

Helen Stead 03:06

At that point, it wasn't really different teams. But obviously they wanted the best during a professional comedy club. Of course, they kind of want the best performer as well. Why wouldn't you? So being part of that I don't think that's necessarily the issue. I think there's just a lot of undermining below that. As someone who's in industry, and even now, quiet often wanted the best team for the best people. I knew myself. I wasn't the strongest player. So I straight away would have gone, this is not my place. This. I could probably name the people I felt were the strongest player. There's more behind that, I think in a social aspect, probably.

Richard Minkley 03:50

So it wasn't just the Glee Club, but there was a culture of The Glee Club.

Helen Stead 03:55

The Glee Club, they wanted the best players for the- They're in such a gorgeous, stunning place. Of course they will, cannot fault anybody on that. I don't know what was going on. I just know there was some new people appearing and things were changing. And the being a form of hangout with your friends on the first day became a you must perform, if you're not feeling up to it, well you have to. Things were just changing. Things do change.

Richard Minkley 04:30

And that change... Because I'm looking at this period and it feels like all of these years kind of blur into one, between we've kind of established that by 2011, you've got the festival, the Glee club, the gorilla burger show nights and the drop in session, so there's lots going on there. And then in the next years, it seems like they blur together into things changing and breaking and crumbling apart.

Helen Stead 04:59

I think they were just trying to work out... They've gone from being a casual fun group to becoming a professional company now, things have to change, and I think there was just the transition of where's the line? How did he do- How did he go about it? What's the best way? That's absolutely fine.

Richard Minkley 05:20

So digging into that then, we've talked about how they wanted the best people for the Glee Club, was that culture present in anything else? Because at the same time, there's the drop-ins Was there that culture feeling there as well?

Helen Stead 05:38

I can't remember that well, to be honest, I just remember starting to feel uncomfortable myself. But I think that was more down to a couple of individuals who were making me uncomfortable as opposed to the whole group. So that's an individual thing.

Richard Minkley 05:53

And would you- Is it a similar story for the other parts of Missimp as well, so there was the drop-ins, and then there's also gorilla burger and the shows they put on at the Art Organization. Did that have the similar feel for you? Or was it- You just described it as being particular people making things a little bit uncomfortable?

Helen Stead 06:16

I think just particular people made it that you couldn't enjoy it in the way you wanted and also for me with the festival and my other shows as well. It felt like I was working in the day, working at night, my hobbies started to become work as well, and I didn't want that. I couldn't, I had to draw a line myself and going, it needs to be fun and for me, it's getting to a point where enough is enough. Just keep the happy memories.

Richard Minkley 06:43

Now, you keep saying for me. You keep using that phrase. I don't want to shock you. But is a dimension of this because you are a woman, because- I really struggle with how to ask gendered questions in these interviews, so I'm apologizing both to history and to you if this is clumsy, but in this story, we've had-

Helen Stead 07:10

Not particularly, cause I work in comedy, and the fact is, there's more men than there are women in comedy. I don't know why, it just seems to appeal more to men than it does to women. So I think when I was there, I didn't necessarily feel that because I was kind of surrounded by that anyway, in my main job of comedy, so I think particularly that, I think it's just a couple of people themselves as individuals who... And that's just what they were like. I wouldn't say it's a whole group thing. I mean, it would be great to have more women in improv, obviously. I just don't think there's as many who are as interested. You're going to get a few, obviously.

Richard Minkley 07:50

So this kind of brings up two questions like, do you remember there being... Was- Things are making noises, I apologise. Was it similar to, because you just described the stand up world as that or just comedy generally, lots of men being involved? Obviously there's lots of all types of people involved, but here in England I don't have facts for this, but it's quite white and it's quite male. Was that reflected in Missimp throughout your time there as well? Or was it a little bit better? A little bit worse?

Helen Stead 08:28

When I think back, there would have been more white men than any other gender or ethnicity. But they were an open group and they weren't like you're not allowed here because you're the wrong gender or the wrong ethnicities, everyone and anyone were welcome. [and I did stay there] and they were encouraging people. I think, I believe now they even have a female only group. Well, I left before that started, so I can't really talk about that. I think they are trying to encourage.

Richard Minkley 09:03

So, if my understanding is correct, you left around about the time that all of these things were going and then afterwards things like the venue, The Glee Club dropping Missimp and the Art Organisation no longer being a space for Missimp, happened. That happened after you left but you were still in Nottingham.

Helen Stead 09:30

It was probably around that same sort of time. I just remember it being around the 2012-2013?

Richard Minkley 09:37

Sounds about right.

Helen Stead 09:40

Yeah, it was around that time, I seem to remember.

Richard Minkley 09:46

So yeah, let's ask those of them individually then. So, do you remember when you decided to leave like the specific moment or the day?

Helen Stead 09:59

Partially, yeah. There'd been a few things build up anyway. One person I know, I did stay friends with for many years afterward as well, I knew were saying things, other people believing it, and I was like, No, I want to keep supporting and doing what I can to help, the best way I can. And whatever was being said behind my back clearly was having an effect on things. And I remember one session, we're in... It wasn't the Art Org, it was the other room, we were doing a jam, and they've got everyone in a circle and do like a song. I have a phobia of singing, sounds stupid, but I've got a big phobia, which they all know. And then someone picked on me and I couldn't do it and they tried to force it to the point I had to run out. And that's never ever happened to me in my life. But I just felt so... Like, I don't matter, do I? It doesn't matter. And I went, I can't have this. I just felt unsupported at that point. It was a hard thing, and I think that, for me, that was the last straw. Oh, and I also remember there being like an award ceremony. And can't remember who it was, I remember there being somebody was being a credited for what an amazing job they've done, where they were actually behind me making me feel uncomfortable and not very safe and happy in that group. And I was like, why is someone being rewarded for the bad things they've done? I can't remember who it was, I can't remember why. I just feel like, I think it was the two together and I went, I'm out. Which is really sad, when I think back, I do really, really miss the happy days. You can probably tell in my voice, I'm getting a bit shaky there. Sorry.

Richard Minkley 11:48

These wouldn't be the first tears, I assure you and if you want me to stop recording for a minute, just-

Helen Stead 11:53

No, no, it's fine, don't worry, I won't. I just don't wanna drop people in.

Richard Minkley 12:02

No, no, it's okay, well, we're going to make sure that, you know, nothing is going to be published that's going to cause us any trouble. So don't you worry too much about that. It's interesting, the thing that keeps sticking out in my head from the description you've just given is that it wasn't to do with the improv. It was to do- It wasn't like, oh, well, actually, improv wasn't interesting. I mean, I could be reading into that, you might have found improv boring, but it seemed to be much more about the people in the community around it.

Helen Stead 12:36

It was. Yeah, it was good fun, it was a laugh. It was definitely the dynamics of the group had changed. And people who were already members plus some new people just made it so uncomfortable that it became difficult and hard and took a long time to find the effort, to kind of build the strength up again to even go, "yeah, okay, I'll go." In fact, I haven't actually been to Missimp show since. I've not had the confidence to do so yet. I don't feel like I'd be welcome into one, to be honest. But I'll keep doing what I can to help, and keep good platforms, and do everything I can.

Richard Minkley 13:21

I'm really sorry to hear that, that is a crying shame. You said you were, you know, you keep trying to help them. So, I believe I participated in one of the Missimp shows at Nottingham Comedy Festival, so you still offered them spots on the festival and things like that.

Helen Stead 13:39

Of course, the they're an important part of the Nottingham comedy scene and I want them to do well, I want them to have the stage, I want more people to get involved with them. More people can see it, they get introduced to the world of comedy and the world of improv, and I think we should be celebrating the Nottingham scene, and Missimp... I think that's just a bad point in Missimp history, I think it started off great and had that dip. And I know how well they're doing now. There's been new people in since, doing amazing things with them. And I wanted to succeed. So I will still go out my way now to do what I can to try and support and help.

Richard Minkley 14:16

It's interesting because we were also talking about the Glee Club. Do you remember the first time regarding The Glee Club where things didn't look steady? Or they seemed a little bit shaky? Do you remember when that process began?

Helen Stead 14:39

I remember a show was going on. I can't remember if it was the Missimp show or stand up show, cause they used to be there quite a lot. And Bradley taking me to a side and going, "we're just not getting numbers in from Missimp. I really want to support them. But we need to do something because financially we can't afford to keep them going at the same time. Can you have a word or something?" I can remember trying to say something to somebody in group. And they just went, "that's our problem, don't worry." And kind of initially pushed me away, "we didn't want to know", and I was literally going, not physically but, they were, I can't remember the exact words now, but it was basically, they didn't want to know. The person I said it to was, I think, was looking after things at that time. [...] They saw themselves are quite important part of Missimp at that time. I don't know if they're still there or not, can't tell you. But yeah, they were very, "why are you getting involved in that, that's our problem, not yours." And I was just going, if they don't want to know, they want to know. I remember saying to my assistant, my colleague at the time, he was part of Missimp, and explaining it to him. I don't think he could get anywhere with it either, I think he was trying to go, "look, you do you need to listen here." Yeah, at that point I went, "they're not gonna listen. What's the point." I'm not sure how long after it was, I think they were given some warning to try and help boost things up.

Richard Minkley 16:10

Was this issue of not getting the numbers in just affecting Missimp or was there... Was it in a wider context of a successful comedy scene, a more difficult comedy scene?

Helen Stead 16:24

It's always been a bit up and down to be honest, we've always at city had some times where it's been really busy and other times have been quieter. Yeah, I don't know if the numbers are brilliant the whole time the venue, but I think Missimp were particularly low to the point they couldn't really afford to stay open for that reason. I think they started putting second shows on and doing one show upstairs and they were downstairs at the same time, so I think they'd tried to be as accommodating as they possibly could. But I couldn't tell you how many numbers they had in for the shows. I remember going

to the Glee and there being packed out rooms. I remember going there and it's been a quieter night. You can't always predict it in comedy, unfortunately.

Richard Minkley 17:05

And that does seem to go with the territory, like we were talking about earlier how jongleurs have gone from being a big player, to being bankrupt, to being sold, to being a company's going in and out of business. It just-

Helen Stead 17:18

It happens all time. I mean, I've had shows where it's been busy one month and dead the next month, and there's literally no reason for it.

Richard Minkley 17:26

This is one of the things, I want to be able to judge what was going on there. But at the same time, you'd kind of need a huge amount of information to really understand, that just isn't available.

Helen Stead 17:39

Yeah, I'd have to literally go to the Glee and go to Mark and Brad and go, "could you give us the facts and figures", but obviously, that's not exactly an easy thing to do. But they're still standing and still doing very well.

Richard Minkley 17:52

Do you remember though, when... This is difficult because now we are stepping outside of your time in Missimp, but it's still something that you're kind of aware of. Do you remember when Missimp no longer had a regular gig and when they lost that opportunity?

Helen Stead 18:12

I remember it going and I remember people being disappointed. I'm sure there was some sort- There was talk about- "It's okay, we will get something else again." But at that point, things were particularly bad that I was trying to keep myself away from it as best as possible, to focus on what I needed to do. I can't really remember, it's all blurred a little bit now.

Richard Minkley 18:35

No, no, that's okay. Um, because at the same time, around the same time, they lost the Art Organization as well. Do you remember anything around when that happened or why it happened?

Helen Stead 18:51

I just remember a lot of uncertainty, and I'm trying to find somewhere new. I might have suggested some venues to them, I think I probably did give some ideas. But I couldn't say where I suggested or where they went to.

Richard Minkley 19:07

That was gonna be my next question.

Helen Stead 19:11

I'll have it on emails, probably, I'm not very good at deleting emails. So I will have them still.

Richard Minkley 19:15

Again, as a historian, that is a great thing to hear. That's interesting. So what was the- Do you remember, not necessarily where you told them to go, but where was available for comedy gigs in the city at that time? Obviously, the Art Organization was closing, Glee Club, not necessarily an option anymore. Pubs, back rooms, was there any particular places around 2013, 2012?

Helen Stead 19:43

2013. There is, but the names escape me. I can find out.

Richard Minkley 19:53

They'll be on a blog somewhere and I can steal it from there. It'll be fine.

Helen Stead 19:57

I'll probably find out just looking from Comedy Festival brochure to see which venues were taking part each year, because every year you get venues coming and going. But obviously, they are quite, they needed special things, they needed enough space for enough people to get there as well, and to be as of little charge as possible across the community group, money was needed to keep them going, it wasn't like they were trying to make money for the sake of it, they needed it, so... I'm not sure where... I can't remember.

Richard Minkley 20:27

No, that's fine. Because this is, I mean, it's not Missimp, but it is definitely something that I'm interested in. So then you were focusing on Nottingham comedy festival, NCF Entertainment, was it that- Is that a kind of idea of a structure, or is that an actual corporate structure? Is there a NCF Entertainment company with these sub companies or is it just in your head? So I said that in a very derogatory way!

Helen Stead 21:00

NCF Entertainment is the company, that's the official company name. So the structure is that is now the overall banner, and we have one sector which is NCF comedy, which we do regular shows, and then we do the festival alongside. We do try to keep two separate to the point we even have two separate email addresses, two separate websites.

Richard Minkley 21:23

They're separate projects, but not a separate like tax situation. Okay, that's very interesting to know.

Helen Stead 21:30

It all goes back to the same NCF Entertainment and anything happens to the festival NCF Entertainment will cover and make sure that's all okay. Yeah, it is one company, just two projects, so to speak.

Richard Minkley 21:44

So this is the awkward thing because now we're going to try and stick seven years into 10 minutes. But, it's fascinating to me that you now have this massive festival, you are a Nottingham comedy promoter. This is your job, you have the festival, you have these gigs. How have those seven years been, post Missimp? Not in the context of Missimp. But like, how has the Nottingham scene changed?

Helen Stead 22:20

Oh, it's changed dramatically, I'd say. I think there's much more going on now. Obviously Missimp have expanded, they've got loads more groups going on there. I'm seeing new comedians on the local scene come up all the time, coming up. It's just great to see and even the audience, we're getting regular people come and going, and coming to our show. Then next day to go to the Glee, next they'll go to Missimp. And it's really changed over the years. Yeah, strange to think how far its come.

Richard Minkley 22:49

Is there any particular... I'm not necessarily going to ask you for the best performers in that time, but are there any performers that you think exemplify that change or that period as people who've, as this community has grown, could be a good example of that growth.

Helen Stead 23:09

I think in Nottingham, I think it's like Scott Bennett, who's a stand up comedian. He started out I think, about the same time. So he starts out 2009, 2010, and you see how far he's come now, and just what strong performer he is. And he's just one example, in Nottingham. There's now multiple, there's many people. We've got the likes of Barry Dodds and Stevie Gray, and Thomas Green, people from all over the world in fact have come to Nottingham now and using this as their little hub to go out further, and it's just brilliant to see. Before we've even gotten the Midlands Comedy Awards. And when East Midlands gets missed off on national lists for awards, we always go hang on, don't forget about us, we're a big part of this, this is our, you know. It's really nice. It's nice to see how far the industry has come.

Richard Minkley 23:59

Before we round up, then, the Midlands Comedy Award. I don't necessarily know much about that as an organization and how big it is, I don't know whether it's the biggest thing in the world or whether it's a small one, what was it like winning that award?

Helen Stead 24:24

Well, we have just won, I'm trying to think which ones we won now, we've won like, the small club award, things like that.

Richard Minkley 24:32

Are there too many awards to remember, is what you're saying?

Helen Stead 24:34

Not for us, no! The Midlands Comedy Awards, though, basically it was set up by a guy in Birmingham, a fantastic comedian over there, and he wanted to celebrate what the Midlands has to offer. And so, it's just nice to see everyone come together. I mean, we've won, I think, three awards, so we were like best small club one year, one for the pound night before. It's just lovely, like because we all celebrate, we're trying to celebrate each other, and work together as a community. Obviously, I don't know what's happening this year. It might not be going ahead this year.

Richard Minkley 25:10

Yeah, that's a fair point. Okay, so we're, it's kind of come to the point where we need to round up the interview. The main questions... There's kind of one or another question. And I'll ask you both of them. We've touched on it already. But I'm going to repeat it again anyway. So the first big one is why did you stick around for the time that you did? Why did you stick around with Missimp?

Helen Stead 25:44

I stuck around that time because I enjoyed it. They're all my friends. We had a laugh. And it was something fun to go and do that's different from the normal life. And why wouldn't you want to go have fun with your friends every single week and play games and forget about your problems?

Richard Minkley 26:04

Well, I think you may be about to answer that question with my next one. Why did you, to summarize, why did you leave in the end?

Helen Stead 26:13

The dynamics of the group had changed, to a point that I was starting to feel uncomfortable, and I didn't feel like I belonged there anymore. And in addition to that, my work was taking me to new places. My company was getting bigger, and I felt I needed to focus on that, and don't confuse the comedy for work and for hobby and then I can get back into enjoying comedy again, whilst I'm just being work orientated.

Richard Minkley 26:40

Yeah, it's interesting, because I'm thinking about, you know, things that are happening more recently that kind of fall outside of the window of the project. How much does burnout play a role in your story, because I've seen people involved in comedy and the arts generally doing creative things, putting them themselves through an enormous amount of stress. Do you remember there being that feeling of stress in Missimp when... Well, there's kind of two chunks. It's sort of like the rise and the fall of Helen at the Missimp. But like, do you remember there being much burnout around?

Helen Stead 27:21

I remember getting to the point where I was getting burnt out with everything that was going on, to the point that I couldn't cope with it any longer. But as a group as a whole, I don't... There always seemed to be new people coming in all the time, bringing new ideas that kind of every time it [seem to get in that way] [...]. Again, and something would come out blue and something would work and it would succeed again.

Richard Minkley 27:44

Okay. That's interesting. So at the end of that period, did it still feel like a community even though we've talked about some of the more toxic elements that were present at that time, was it still a community? Did it feel like one?

Helen Stead 28:04

It was still a community, I just, I felt like I didn't belong in that community anymore. I felt like I was pushed out of it. But there was still a community. I still see them on the Facebook groups for years after and we do still do meetups and... -the way they were, just the dynamics have changed, and there's a lot of people I used to go to Missimp with who have now also left. But I've still got some great friends who I still see to this day from the group.

Richard Minkley 28:36

Fantastic. No, that's fantastic. The interview has been fantastic. Not fantastic that you've had to kind of leave a community. That's terrible.

Helen Stead 28:50

I understand where you're coming from, historical reasons. I think historically, it's interesting, I understand that.

Richard Minkley 28:55

Is there anything else that I... Obviously this is a big period of your life, and I can't cover all of it but is there anything else in your experience with Missimp that I haven't touched upon, that you'd like to say, kind of slide in at the end.

Helen Stead 29:18

I don't know really. It starts off as brilliant and I wish I could go back to those days and see everyone and be like how it used to be. Unfortunately, it just... Whether... I think there were people there who carried on saying things long after I went, which when I left, I thought, "I can come back out and join in again and see the shows", and because of this person, I feel I can't. And I have felt the cold shoulder from a few people since then, but not others, there's many of us since then I think have gone on to do great things and it's a fantastic, like, I love what the Rhymes Against Humanity guys are doing and to point you- The Rhymes Against Humanity, Lloydie, and, his team. To the point that I'm, even a couple months ago, I put them back on my gig again. So I've not been back to a Missimp show, but I've had some of the guys back on my stage. And I hope that over the years that can come back again. And we can, no matter what happened in Missimp, I was gonna keep supporting local comedy, it's just such an important part of the city. We need to be celebrating that and keeping hold of it, and do everything we can to help support it.

Richard Minkley 30:32

I'm going to slide in a question right at the end there. This isn't necessarily history, but what is your relationship with Missimp at the moment, then, because I know we've touched on it in different parts of the interview. But what is your... What would you consider your relationship with Missimp- I mean, I don't know whether it was a community or an organization, but what do you feel about that?

Helen Stead 30:56

Sorry I missed part of that question because the signal died.

Richard Minkley 30:58

Yeah, it was good because I did a really bad job of asking the question, what's your relationship with Missimp both as an organization and a community at the moment then?

Helen Stead 31:11

Right now, I see them as a fantastic comedy group. And I will deal with them to be able to put them into the comedy festival and give them more platforms if something comes about, I will absolutely give them opportunities and support them any way they can. I think I see them now how I see other comedy colleagues. They're another important part of the Nottingham comedy society. And I want to do, I think I can support them. Some of them are still close friends. And some, I might not hang out with as much as I used to. But I still see them when I can.

Richard Minkley 31:52

That is a very, very interesting perspective. But I've already kept you for a little bit too long on the recording. So I'm going to wind it up there, unless there's anything else you want to add at the end or are you happy?

Helen Stead 32:05

I think so. If there's anything I've missed, just let me know. I'm always happy to chat and-

Richard Minkley 32:09

I've resigned myself. Everyone's gonna miss something. So don't worry too much. I've got plenty to deal with. Right I'm gonna stop running-

6. Lloydie James Lloyd

6.1. Interview 1 of 1

a) Part 1 of 2

23rd June 2020

Disclaimer

While still very active in nottingham's improv scene, Lloydie James Loyd is no longer part of the community's executive group.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

improv, people, nottingham, Thursday, glee club, improviser, comedy, remember, January, interesting, glee, year, form, charlotte, week, bit, literally, called, stage, Geoff

SPEAKERS

Lloydie, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

We are recording too. There we go. Okay, so it is the 23rd of June- messed that up. 23rd of June at 10 past five. And I'm here with Lloydie James Lloyd and this is Richard Minkley interviewing Lloydie for the Missimp oral history project. Sorry, all the admin you have to shove it at the beginning. How's it going?

Lloydie 00:22

Oh, yeah. Plenty of housekeeping. Yeah, lovely. Good. Thank you. Good.

Richard Minkley 00:26

Fantastic. Let's jump straight into it, then. What was, if you can, what's your first memory of Missimp?

Lloydie 00:39

Well, I had contacted what I thought was Missimp early January of 2010. Must have been. Was it in 2010? No, 2009 possibly. Hang on. I've got to get this right. Now, I moved to Nottingham in- yeah, it would have been a January 20... Must have been January. No January 2009. God, I don't know numbers. Yes, January 2009. Because I've moved to Nottingham in 2008. And in January 2009, I emailed what I thought was Missimp because I like googled improv in Nottingham and found a website with the mission impossible theme tune that just played really annoyingly, every time I went to the website. I was like, oh my god, and I emailed but I got an email back after a bit of a delay from the wonderful Charlotte Matheson who was still running a Tuesday group which I think Geoff, whose second name I can't remember, Kiwi Geoff, who's now in New Zealand. I think it was kind of the tail end of what he was running. Because Charlotte did about three Tuesdays with us in January and then it all got folded into Thursdays and became part of Missimp. And I remember going along to one, one Thursday and it was being run by Geoff Monk. And it was all short form And you know, it's a bit

chaotic. And I just... One of the things I remember and it was it was kind of as much about the Tuesdays as it was the Thursday. We were on the first floor of the Hopkinson's- what is now the Hopkinson's Gallery on Station street, and there just was no signage. So like I remember the first time I went there, I was told where to go, but like, I didn't know there was an upstairs like, I didn't know you could go upstairs and there's only this door, no sign on the door. So it was one of those things where it was really confusing and I remember the very first Tuesday I went there. I almost didn't ask anyone or go upstairs because it was kind of a ramshackle place where there was like someone on a tea bar, and like a load of old, it wasn't like it's run now where it is a kind of proper, like vintage shop, it was just all kinds of shit in there. And I was like, I don't really know where I am, whether it is here and if I said improv whether anyone would know. And I almost left, so I almost didn't do it at all, which would have drastically changed my entire life. So my first memory was, oh my god, where am I? This place is nothing like I've ever encountered before. And I don't know what I'm meant to do. There was no signage. I remember Charlotte in a session that we had, I mean, she is... Like, she's brilliantly cerebral, like patient with people but also has this like, really wonderful sense of the ridiculous. So those first three kind of workshops I had with her were a delight. And I knew that, oh, yeah, this is a thing. I'm interested in this. And then the Thursday had been, like, so chaotic in every sense of the word, genuinely. And I was like, yeah, I'm gonna come again to this. I don't know what make of it, but I'm gonna come again to it.

Richard Minkley 04:15

Hmm, that's interesting. Oh, wow, there's so much dig into there. So there's two separate things going on here. There's the Tuesday group, was this called anything in particular was it just the people around Charlotte Matheson?

Lloydie 04:30

And it wasn't really called anything and it wasn't, there wasn't like a heading on the email or whatever it was just, you know, we're running these sessions. And whether it was, oh, these, you know, here's some new people. Let's see what happens with them rather than like the current Thursday group. Because it was, you know, it wasn't like it is now. So you know that the Thursday group was really about a dozen people who would get together and play Short Form games every Thursday. There was no particular instruction unless people needed to know how the game worked, then people would just play games. It was like the Thursday "jam" as it was known, was a jam in that people got together and played games, you know, zero instructional element.

Richard Minkley 05:16

Yeah.

Lloydie 05:16

Whereas the Tuesdays, the three Tuesdays I had, was instructed, but there were really only about three or four of us. I remember, Kat Clark, Katherine Clark. She was one of the people there. There was a guy there who was really interested in comedy and disappeared, I think after two. Oh, there was Adrian, whose second name I can't remember. Who is still around in Nottingham. Wonderful, quite quietly spoken tall guy. Incredibly thoughtful, very intelligent man.

Richard Minkley 05:47

Is this man also called Ade? Or is-

Lloydie 05:51

He might be, I don't know.

Richard Minkley 05:52

Okay. I thought I'd double check that, but yeah, you tell me about Adrian.

Lloydie 05:56

Yeah. Um, and you know, just with a few of us it was... Yeah, it was tremendous fun and really... Yeah. Engaging. Interesting. Interesting.

Richard Minkley 06:06

So if there was about four people in that Tuesday slot, do you remember how many people were at the Thursday? I don't want to, it feels weird call it a Thursday slot but the sort of, in my head, they seem more like the Missimp people on a Thursday.

Lloydie 06:20

Yes. And I mean, Thursday was Missimp, although it was kind of being called improv jam at the time. Although, it was, I think, Geoff Monk later said can we have Missimp in there somewhere. But it... So this would have been... Yeah, January 2009. And there were about a dozen people there. Almost no one there that January that you would know now, other than... About the same week that I started going along, Martin Fingal started going along. We were... I don't know what it is. I think he might have been a week after me, or it might have been a week before me. I'm not sure. But it was around... It was like within about a week of each other. We both started at that same time.

Richard Minkley 07:10

That's really interesting! And what was the- Oh, wait, you've already explained a little bit of the difference between that thing. That's interesting. So you... I'm just thinking a little bit on which way to take this. So why did- sorry. The thing I was wondering is, there is a point in a lot of people's lives where they may try improv, but they don't necessarily come back for a second or third week. Why did you, in that initial stage, decide to keep coming along to improv stuff? Both. Both of them, you know, together, as it were?

Lloydie 07:50

Um, I think it's... I think there are a lot of levels to it. One level was... One level was, in my mind, I've kind of already made a commitment that that year I was going to do something comedic or like dramatic. I wanted to do either some drama-y acting thing with comedy in it, or, or I'd even talked to a friend of mine who teaches stand up and was considering doing stand up. Which now I would genuinely never consider. Not that I hate stand up. But I don't think I would be cut out to be one because I prefer collaboration to being on my own.

Richard Minkley 08:28

So you were talking to someone about doing stand up, or was it just another thing-

Lloydie 08:32

No, yes, yeah. There's someone I was working with was also a stand up. And that same person, when I said I was going along to improv, lent me a copy, his copy, of Truth in Comedy. He's never done improv, but he had a copy of Truth in Comedy. And I think that helped cement it because I had something to read. It was interesting because I mentioned it at the Thursday and no one at that time

had heard of that book. They'd heard of Improv by Keith Johnston, but they hadn't heard of Truth in Comedy.

Richard Minkley 09:02

That's fascinating.

Lloydie 09:04

It was not such a known thing. What, 11 maybe 11 and a half years ago.

Richard Minkley 09:09

I'm gonna ask- This isn't vital information, but are you happy to tell me the name of the person you were talking about doing stand up with or would you prefer to leave that out?

Lloydie 09:19

Oh, yes, absolutely. Yes. I don't mean to be mysterious about it, it was James Cook, who used to do the drive time show on Trent FM when I did the afternoon show. So he was on just after me. He's a stand up comedian. Does the news with jokes podcast. He, yeah-

Richard Minkley 09:23

James Cook. Fantastic. Okay, that's really interesting. So you said there were many layers and you were describing that you were looking for something comedic and dramatic sort of thing.

Lloydie 09:48

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 09:49

Is that... What are the other layers that you were thinking of?

Lloydie 09:52

So in my head, I was definitely looking for something. I'd already kind of... I found Charlotte's- Because it was every Tuesday and it was something new and different, I was like, I was going to give it a chance. There weren't many people doing it. But I was like, no, this is interesting. I'm finding something out. Charlotte was actually teaching me something. She talked about accepting, and building, and the building blocks of improv and I was like, oh, this is interesting. This is the thing I haven't encountered. So like my brain got sparked. Then the Thursday's happened, and I realized, okay, they're like, we've got a dozen people doing this in this city, of a variety of different abilities. But the one thing that I found, I was very lucky, and it's probably because of like, I'd done drama before, but I'd also done radio and other things before. But I was, you know, I was able to keep up. So it wasn't something where I was, like, hopelessly floundering and don't get me wrong, I wasn't someone who came in and was like, boom, boom, boom, boom, either. But I remember David Ferland McCollough turning to me and he said, yes, when you and Martin arrived, people went, oh, these people might be something. Which was a really lovely thing to say. But I think, but Martin and I had had kind of backgrounds where, you know, different types of performance. So, I think you can often tell in improv, you know, when someone's had like a performance background, because they might not get actually the building blocks of improv, they're able to kind of bluff and carry it off anyway. So, and I've been a buffer for most of my life. So yeah, that's interesting. So at that point, I felt like, Hey, I'm not the top of this, but I've come in and I'm like, I can hold my own with people. So that's interesting.

Maybe I should dig into that a bit more. And so I, you know, continue to come along for weeks and weeks.

Richard Minkley 11:50

Wow, this is... So, diving into that period of time, so it's early 2009. I know that on the horizon there is things picking up like the Nottingham comedy festival. And yeah, there's the first Nottingham Comedy Festival and then The Glee Club. Is there anything that happened in that first year that stands out to you or anything, particularly about your relationship in there?

Lloydie 12:21

Well, I mean... I often used to meet Helen Stead beforehand for cake. So it would be cake then improv basically. So I remember the Nottingham Comedy Festival starting, which I think was 2010, wasn't it?

Richard Minkley 12:38

Yes, I believe it was early 2010.

Lloydie 12:40

Yeah. Because I remember her and Rachel starting it. So I remember that, cake then improv, and then always beer afterwards. So there was the social element as well. And once you'd be going six weeks, you knew more and more and more people. And it was my Thursday, my boss at work would be like, well, Thursday improv, do you know what you're gonna do yet? And then I'd always have to say no, I guess we'll have to make up on the night, literally every Thursday. And the joke was obviously, it wasn't in the least bit funny, but that just became regular Thursdays. I remember the Friday.... The shows, I think the first few were on Fridays, and then they move to Saturdays, if I remember correctly. I think we might have done one on a Friday but the monthly shows it started, if I remember correctly, in December 2008. I went to see the show in January 2009. And I remember distinctly it was a show where literally everybody from the Thursday got up and performed. And I was only there because Charlotte mentioned it. I was like, yeah, I'll check out an improv show. And it was like, three quid on the door or something. And it was bring your own booze, which I also enjoyed. And because it was literally everybody who went along, there was no kind of thresholds. So again, I was like, top performers, I was like, oh, interesting, what they were doing. And people who were less experienced. I was like, I think I could hold my own. It was like, it was that kind of thing. I mean, it was if I remember correctly, it was a competitive show. I think it might be a Maestro. I think Geoff might have hosted it. But it was January 2009. I think it was the Knights of Jamalot, it was called. And I remember going there thinking, yeah, I've got something to aim towards, but I don't think it's unachievable for me. And then in March 2009, they were doing another competitive format. Again, hosted by Geoff and they needed players for it. So both me and Martin were in that show and which is... Like the weird thing about, I think, when you've got a really small scene and lots of new people coming in, like this would never happen now, but I literally started it in January, and then I was on stage in March. And because at the time [jongleurs], I think might have still been open or it might have been around the time they closed, There was no Glee club, just the [tonic], were only Sunday nights at the approach. So as a result, on a Saturday night, there's really no other comedy in the city. And so we really get 50, 60. I mean, some shows even got like 90 people in that small space. We had to put up our own curtains and everything. I remember that very distinctly. We had to put up curtains in the stage and then disassemble it afterwards. But yeah, to be in a show in the March, and we only started in January. I mean, that was really weird and wouldn't happen now. Which has pros and cons obviously.

Richard Minkley 16:03

That is interesting. Yeah. So there's several things that we need to dig into. Very quickly. What cake did you have before? Like, where did you go for cake?

Lloydie 16:16

Oh, right. Okay, various places, but it was really quite often Lee Rosie's.

Richard Minkley 16:21

Yes, okay.

Lloydie 16:22

Because good cake. And you could then walk to Station Street afterwards, so we'd walk across town. But Lee Rosie's as it was, are just opposite the Broadway cinema as it used to be. And no longer is sadly. Yeah, we would go there quite a lot.

Richard Minkley 16:39

Okay, so you also use the phrase, they did a Maestro, what what's a Maestro?

Lloydie 16:44

Maestro is a format created by Keith Johnston and it's a competitive improv format. And I remember it was a bit confusing, but the one thing from that March show that I remember, firstly, I remember getting to the final, which is like- and in these competitive shows that really doesn't mean very much. But it meant a lot to me partly, A, because it was my first time on stage. But B, it meant I got to do an extra scene. I've got to do another scene in the final bit. So I had a bit more stage time. I wasn't... I remember, I wasn't great. I had to do- they did like a news game where you know, you've got two news anchors, and they go to people, I had to be the weather forecaster, or the voice of God or something. I can't remember but I said very little. I remember that.

Richard Minkley 17:34

To be fair, they're very similar, weathermen and the voice of God.

Lloydie 17:38

Well, yeah, I can't remember whether the weatherman- I don't remember. I just remember there was something to do with the weather. So yeah, um... My big memory of it was though, Geoff had got this organized system whereby he picked the players by, like he had a load of balls in a little basket and he'd rotate the balls in the basket and then take a ball out the basket and say, player number three that's you know, whoever, that's David! And off they'd scuttle onto stage, or someone else, and unfortunately the thing broke and it spilt the balls all over the stage, they rolled off the stage. And I remember that distinctly. And Geoff like, trying to hold it together, get all the balls, and it was just one of those wonderfully glorious chaotic moments that I was like, Oh, this is great.

Richard Minkley 18:28

That sounds like a delightful catastrophe. Yeah. So do you remember any of your scenes from that show?

Lloydie 18:35

Aside from saying something about the weather? I might have been a weather God or something.

Richard Minkley 18:44

Weather God. Okay.

Lloydie 18:45

Something like that. Aside from that, I have absolutely zero memory of it.

Richard Minkley 18:49

Okay.

Lloydie 18:50

Cus it was over 11 years ago.

Richard Minkley 18:54

Okay, but that's interesting. So at this point, it's difficult, because I'll be honest, there's something I'm aware of with you is that there's a heck of a lot to talk about. So I'm worried about skipping over things. But the next big thing in my head is the Nottingham Comedy Festival kind of kicking off sometime in 2010. Were you involved in a comedy festival, just quickly, before we dive into it?

Lloydie 19:27

I mean, I was in 2010. Yes, I was. Because I have done-

Richard Minkley 19:35

Yeah. Was there was there a general pattern then it became, you've said it became your Thursdays. And the Tuesday, I'm assuming in that time between when you started and when things like the Glee Club and the comedy festival started... The Tuesday group was folded in in that period.

Lloydie 19:53

Tuesday group was folded like literally, because only three or four of us came along, and I think one Tuesday in January, so literally my third week in-

Richard Minkley 20:02

Okay.

Lloydie 20:02

Like just me and Kats and Charlotte. So Charlotte said, No, we're just going to fold it into Thursdays. So that's when I went to see Knights of Jamalot. And then I think the very last Thursday in January, or it could have been the first one in February, I went along to Thursday.

Richard Minkley 20:19

Okay, and then did it just tick along? That became Lloydie's Thursday evening, going to improv and playing?

Lloydie 20:25

It did. But I remember... And actually, I remember we used to go to the Company Inn an awful lot. It's a Wetherspoons or some such. I would not go there now due to political protesting. But I do remember the cheap beer, and I've been looking at improv courses. And so after, I remember talking to a couple of people about this course that I wanted to go on in New York, because I was going to take a trip to New York anyway, why not just have a week and do some comedy? And I'd heard, I'm sure, because the reason I got into improv because I love 30 Rock, and I'd seen Tina Fey do some on YouTube. So I

thought, I remember her talking about the Upright Citizens Brigade, at some point, I'd heard it or seen it in an interview. I'd looked them up, and I looked at their website because I was like, oh, I'll go see some comedy. Wait, they do a one week intensive? So I booked on it. And that was January 2010. That's what changed everything for me. But also, bearing in mind until that point, Missimp had exclusively done short form. It's also what had a big impact on, you know, what Missimp is now because all of a sudden, it wasn't just exclusively-

Richard Minkley 21:44

So let's break that down a little bit. You said that one of the reasons you got into it was Tina Fey and-

Lloydie 21:50

Yeah. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 21:52

The video you're talking about, seeing her on YouTube, was it the ASSSSCAT video where she does a monologue about ham?

Lloydie 21:59

It was the monologue about ham that made me want to do improv. I hadn't even seen the rest of the scenes, some of which have not aged well.

Richard Minkley 22:08

No, no, I remember there's-

Lloydie 22:10

Some have aged pretty badly. But the monologue about ham, I was like, Wow, she's just standing there. And this was at the time when I was like, is it improv? Is it stand up? Is it theater? What is it? And I was like, and it was just from watching, I think it was probably in some 30 Rock outtakes or something, that I came across this monologue of ham. And I was like, Yeah, I want to give it go. I want to try improv. So that's why I looked up the Upright Citizens Brigade theatre, because she had connections with Amy Poehler, who she'd done a lot of work with, who was one of the co-owners of the theater. And I booked on a one week intensive, and I I didn't know what I was booking on. It said long form improv and I was like, I don't really know what that is. And I arrived in New York, saw my first long form improv show which happened to have like people from 30 Rock in it and was a bunch of veteran performers, it wasn't like a new team. I was watching one of the big Saturday night teams, which actually also had someone who would end up being one of my improv teachers in it as well. And it blew my mind. And I just thought, Oh, God, I've got to learn that on Monday. I can't do that. I simply cannot do that. And that week... I hate it when people say, Oh, it was a week that changed my life, because it sounds like some kind of religious conversion experience. And really, we don't need that kind of language in improv, but it was a week that changed my life. I mean, the trajectory of my life changed massively in that week. And I suddenly discovered there's this thing called long form improv. And I remember coming back in, it must have been the February probably. And bear in mind, the Thursday's had always been jams. It was just us playing games. I was like, Can I... Can I teach some scene work and maybe get us to do an Armando? And, I did and there were some... And there was some laughs. I mean, I was literally trying to vomit out of my brain all the stuff that I'd learned into some kind of like.. Can we do a thing? Can we do a thing? Because as soon as I got back it struck me, wait, so I've learned this thing, and literally nobody else around me knows this thing at all.

Richard Minkley 24:22

Is this... There's a little... It sounds like there's a little bit of- in the land of the blind the one eyed man is king. In the land of short form the one long form guy is king.

Lloydie 24:32

Well, yeah, I mean, not king, but I mean, it was like... and it was one of those things where, I knew I am absolutely not capable of teaching this properly. But I also want people... I want people to play with! So therefore in the July of that year, I went and did another course, another intensive, a two week intensive, at UCB.

Richard Minkley 24:55

So hang on a sec. When did you do your first one? If you did July 2010, did you say?

Lloydie 25:00

I did January 2010. And then I did July 2010. And then in January 2011, Chelsey Clark, who was my level two teacher in that July, we flew her over to the UK. And she did a bunch of workshops with like, for two different levels, for more experienced players and the newer players. Because at that point, I was like, look, I am not capable of teaching this, but we need to find somebody who is, and Chelsea's bloody brilliant.

Richard Minkley 25:30

So let's- We've jumped over a huge amount there.

Lloydie 25:34

I know, I know, I'm so sorry.

Richard Minkley 25:35

I would like to know, what was your first course like? Now, there's- Obviously you've explained it as being "life changing", so I can imagine there's lots in there, but like, what did you learn? What were you doing there?

Lloydie 25:50

Well, it was a lot of stuff that, because I'd been used to playing games and being given either restrictions or you know, endowments that you had to embody, this was like, right, we're going to take one word, and you're going to be two people missing. And we need to find out, you know, who, what and where. And you need to "yes, and" each other. It was all that stuff. It was a level one course. And we'll get onto this later, but when I did write a level one course, the Missimp- I mean, still, the level one course that is being taught all these years later, a large amount of it is stuff that I had gleaned when I was at UCB. And it was me amending my notes and going, oh okay, this doesn't quite translate, or actually our sensibilities is more this, but yeah. So it was, so for me, it was like introducing object work and things like that. We touched on it, obviously, because we did bits of that in short form, but to actually kind of be instructed in it and not...

Richard Minkley 26:51

So there's much more focus on open scenes?

Lloydie 26:56

Yeah, what we would call open scenes, yeah. They would just call them scenes.

Richard Minkley 27:03

Yeah! That's an interesting distinction. How did you find bringing your experience of English improv? Well, yeah, I suppose you could call it English improv to an American setting?

Lloydie 27:16

Well, I mean, I think a lot of the cultural differences in terms of you know, what we do in improv are essentially exaggerated. Every now and again people don't get what you mean, but the biggie for—that's a great teapot.

Richard Minkley 27:34

Sorry, I'm trying to stealthy pour some tea, sorry.

Lloydie 27:39

I think the biggie for me was, I was from an entirely short form background, like I had only done short form for a year. These people, the majority of them were from an entirely long form background. They'd never done short form. They'd seen whose line. But when they'd gone to UCB, they would talk long form. They would never talk short. So they'd like seen it on the telly, but they've only ever done.... That was all they ever knew.

Richard Minkley 28:06

That's really interesting.

Lloydie 28:06

So, yeah, I mean, and I think short form is particularly cool on open scenes because they lack restriction. So like, you know, a closed scene is, you know, something with, you know, it's a game, it's got a restriction or an endowment or you know, or a pattern that is pre-determined about it.

Richard Minkley 28:23

That's very interesting. So, and then you brought that back, how did people react to bringing that kind of new idea?

Lloydie 28:35

I mean, most people were really interested in, ooh, what's the new thing? What is it? What have you done? Because the question I got was, ooh, have you learnt any new games? I was like, No. It was not what I expected. So it was... Yeah, I think for many years there were some people who were very resistant of long form. I mean, some of whom now do it all the time and never touch short form. But I think there was a resistance because it was different, and therefore, like short form had the ready made jokes, and our initial attempts at long form, in shows, initially, were never as well received by audiences as short form. And in my head, I was like, Yeah, I know. But that's because we haven't cracked it yet. Because I had seen long form done really, really well, and seen that it could be every bit as funny, and there will be those that argue, oh, it's more funny or whatever, you know, I'm not I'm not interested in that particular debate. But for me, there was something more satisfying about watching it. I have nothing against short form games. I'd probably rather watch them and play them. I have no real interest in playing them because, like I say, a lot of them have restrictions, and I feel the restriction. I think they're great exercises. And I don't mind watching other people struggle with restrictions, but I'd rather be free onstage! So, there was resistance, there were certain camps that were like, it's never as funny, it's never as good. And in the end, and again this is me skipping forward,

I'm sorry, but a couple of years after that, after Chelsea Clark had been really, no might have been Brandon Gardner... Actually, it was Brandon Gardener who came in 2012. After he came, four of us formed a very short lived, four man, and it was four men unfortunately, long form team called Fisticuffs. So it was me, Martin Findal, [NAME], and, Brendan, whose second name I've just forgotten that I'm going to look up. Oh, God. Sorry, Brandon. Please don't ever.

Richard Minkley 30:48

Don't ever look in-

Lloydie 30:49

Brandon Curtis Burton.

Richard Minkley 30:50

Brandon Curtis Burton.

Lloydie 30:52

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 30:52

Okay. Well, we've jumped a little bit ahead. So before-

Lloydie 30:56

I'm sorry.

Richard Minkley 30:57

-before Fisticuffs... Which came first, I'm going to skip a little bit, the Glee Club or a HR's Days Night.

Lloydie 31:07

Oh, Jesus. Well, that wasn't really improv.

Richard Minkley 31:12

My understanding is though, that there was a lot of improv people in there. And you did the 20- because we've been talking about long form, you did the 24 hour-

Lloydie 31:22

Impossibly devious fundraiser. Yeah. There were a lot of improv people in it. And yeah, that was a play what I wrote, God. I've no idea why people wanted to be in that, but you know, God bless them for one wanting to. Yeah, because we performed that originally at the studio theater of the arts theater. What came first? HR days night must have come first, I think.

Richard Minkley 32:01

Well, we can figure out the details of it. The thing I find interesting about it is, it comes up as a kind of interesting moment. But I find it interesting that there's lots of things going on there. As well as there's obviously you putting on a play, which is really interesting. You took it to Edinburgh, which is another thing.

Lloydie 32:22

Yeah!

Richard Minkley 32:22

There's also, when it came to putting on a play, you turned to an improv community, or did- In fact, that's me reading into something that might not be there. When you had that idea for the play when you were thinking about doing the play, did you assume that you'd be able to lean on the improv community for help and support or like to be involved?

Lloydie 32:47

It was more that I thought improvisers would be good. Because they'd have a sense of the rhythm and the timing of making it funny and working with the audience. Even though there was no improv in it, you know, improv involves a decent amount of acting, so.... Yes, because Martin Berry directed it and really brought it to life, to be fair, he made it funny.

Richard Minkley 33:17

Yeah?

Lloydie 33:19

I've got a couple of jokes in it probably, but wouldn't have necessarily been good ones if I wrote them, but he made it funny. So yeah, um, what was the-? It was more there were there was really good talent in the improv community. We did take people from outside of the improv community as well. They and they fitted it in less well.

Richard Minkley 33:45

Really? That's interesting.

Lloydie 33:47

Yeah, improvisers were infinitely better. They were able to time the lines much better than those who didn't have the improv experience, and had the acting background.

Richard Minkley 33:58

That's very interesting. What was it like having-? Do you remember anything about the 24 hour improv session, because a lot of people have picked that out as a memory of something-

Lloydie 34:11

I memories of it, but I went home and had a long sleep in the middle of it. At that time, and very much in my early couple of years at Missimp, and this came on just after I'd moved to Nottingham as well, I had some kind of mild chronic fatigue, if that makes sense. I was just not- I suffered a lot with lack of energy, and eventually it kind of went and I have no idea exactly what caused it or exactly actually what got rid of it, other than a little bit of discipline, and kind of trying to look after myself as much as possible. But, that, I was definitely suffering from it around then, and so during the 24 hour thing, I do remember going home and having really quite good sleep after about 1am. Until about, I don't know, 9am or something. I mean, you know, I did not dive into it as much as I would have wanted to, particularly as it was fundraising for a play that I'd written. I remember, gosh, yes, I remember we would be warming up for shows upstairs in the area that we'd normally rehearse in, and then going down and performing on the stage and doing I think, a 50 minute set, and then there would be a 10 minute turnaround. And we had lots of different types of show, like Geoff was doing like a Maestro or a... And some other types. We'd have some like regular kind of like short format shows, have one show full of difficult games. I did one show where we did an Armando, which was... which I remember

doing. It didn't really land, it didn't really quite work, but it was, you know... God, I'm trying to think what year that would have been.

Richard Minkley 36:01

I'm sure I've got the dates in some sort of- I've stripped all the dates from the website, so I should be able to find it there. Just seeing where it fits in your brain. That's interesting. So I'm going to jump ahead if- Unless there's something big in between there that you think we should jump on. Do you remember your first memory of Missimp doing anything with The Glee Club or being introduced to The Glee Club?

Lloydie 36:25

Yes, so I mean, that came through Helen Stead, really. Nottingham Comedy Festival, and what have you, she was talking to Mark Tughan and... He was going to be opening, and I think she was talking to him probably about Comedy Festival stuff, but she mentioned Missimp. So he came along to a Saturday night show, one of the monthly shows, and it must have been in early 2010.

Richard Minkley 37:00

Yeah.

Lloydie 37:03

And he... And it was like a well attended one, we must have had at least 60 or 70 odd people in the room. 60 at least. And I remember he'd come along, watched it. And obviously he saw that we were getting a crowd. So of course, he wanted to get a crowd for his new venue. And he basically said, Do you want to perform my venue? And I don't know the conversations that happened after that, particularly, but we said yes. We... Two things. Firstly, they had an opening night, where we went on, did some games, and absolutely slayed.

Richard Minkley 37:51

Were you in that first show?

Lloydie 37:54

Yes.

Richard Minkley 37:55

Okay. How did it go?

Lloydie 37:58

Well, they had a soft opening night firstly, which we were in. And I remember, we absolutely slayed, we did really well, like, we did better than a lot of stand ups and being on a mix book with stand ups, you know, I think any improviser will tell you, you don't know how that's gonna go, it's a mixed blessing sometimes. Depends on the audience and all sorts, but we really slayed. But I remember the first show, because the first show was... We started at Glee in 2010, didn't we? And it was on the 13th of October 2010.

Richard Minkley 38:30

Yes, that's true. I actually have that written down in one of my notes here that I'm scribbling through. Yeah, the opening night was the 13th.

Lloydie 38:38

Yeah, that was our first ever show. Yeah, I know because it was my birthday.

Richard Minkley 38:42

Oh, I was just about to say happy birthday, but that was literally 10 years ago.

Lloydie 38:48

Yeah. Well, happy birthday to me for like, yeah, 10 years ago.

Richard Minkley 38:53

But yeah, that's until you said two things. The second thing that it was your birthday.

Lloydie 38:59

Yeah, that's how I remember what date it was, because it was my birthday and I was... Yeah.

Richard Minkley 39:04

So, I'm interested, because you said there like, Oh, we did better than some of the stand-ups I'm interested in, how do you see... Just, in my head, I've got the time where I was talking about it, where it's always, it feels like a moment of pride. Well from me, and this other improviser I was talking to, when an improv show does better than a standup... How did you feel, to really dig into the community side of it, though? What did it feel like? In fact, I'm going to, instead of asking you four questions and leaving you a little bit bamboozled, I'm going to ask you one question, then ask you another. Did Missimp, October 2010, did it feel like a community or like a club or an activity group or something like that? Did it feel like a community?

Lloydie 39:45

It didn't feel like a community at that point, there weren't enough people in it. It felt like a club. That people drifted in and out of. There was a core, probably around 8 to ten people, you'd have me, Martin, Marylin, Nick, David Ferland McCollough, Kat Clarke was still very involved. Charlotte Matherson was still very involved. By that point, we also had people like Elliot coming along, and... There's probably one or two others that I've missed. But, like, there was probably a hard core of about... Oh, Trilly was definitely coming along by then. Yes, because I'm sure he wasn't in the early Glee shows, I don't think. But I think he was coming along by then. So I would say there was a hard core of about ten of us, and there were another ten or so people who kind of came less regularly, drifted in and out, etc. It very much felt like a club. It felt like a community club.

Richard Minkley 40:58

That's interesting. So how did it feel to have your club absolutely smash it at the Glee clubs opening night?

Lloydie 41:08

It was... Like there were lots of little staging posts in an improv career, such as there is one, you know, I am technically now a professional improviser in that, you know, I get paid to perform and teach around the world and I'm in a very privileged position as a result. And I think one of those, like, I think, the Glee Club moment, I suddenly realized, wait, apart from like, okay, comedy store players going along time, there's maybe the May Days, at that point, were also doing Komedia in Brighton. And I think at that point, you had Manchester comedy sports at the Manchester Comedy Store. That was it in terms of like, residences that had a comedic prowess about them, as literally number four in the

country, like there was, you know, because the Glee was seen as a very, you know, important comedy brand. So it was a validation for us, I think, for, you know, a community that was, you know, not really even on at that point it was, you know, for a little kind of group of improvisers in the city of Nottingham, it was pretty big deal. It was a pretty big deal being offered a residency like that. And yes, in part, it was, you know, they wanted to bring people in late, you know, they knew we had a ready made audience. But, there was a real feeling of validation about it.

Richard Minkley 42:36

That's really interesting. I'm just going to double check my notes because we are coming to the end of our first half and I know you have a new kitten that needs to be fondled.

Lloydie 42:46

Oh, yeah. Well, I'll bring it into the second half because you know...

Richard Minkley 42:50

Oh, no, that's gonna fall apart.

Lloydie 42:52

Well, I'll see how it goes. If he gets too distracting...

Richard Minkley 42:56

Okay. So... Hmm, I don't really have too much more to add there. But it feels like there's a big chapter there that we've been through. What do you think was the thing that kept you coming along throughout that period? Because we've talked about why you came back, why you went in the first place and why you kind of went back on week two or three. But now you've just done the Glee club, is where we are in this kind of chronology. What was it that kept bringing you back all throughout that time, including all of the festival and possibly HR days night, depending on what the date of that was?

Lloydie 43:38

I mean, it's not one factor. But like I said, when I started it, there was something in my head was like... It's funny, I had a coach, like a life coach, who I had for about a year, just before I moved to Nottingham, and I'd been saying to him for a year, there's something else that I'm not doing and I don't know what it is. Like I'm on the radio, I love comedy, I love this, I love that, I've written a play yada yada. There is something, like we described it as there's this misty curtain and the other side of it, there is something. Because I felt... Which is why I was determined I was going to go out and find something and I thought it might be stand up. And it was improv because what improv brought together was the theatrical elements, the performance elements, the comedy elements. It brought together you know, some of the stuff I've done in broadcasting, it was a very unconscious kind of competence in a lot of ways. Because, you know, just the brain is often spewing out stuff, which, you know, intersected with my interest in hypnosis. It was one of those things, which, by the time I went and had that life changing week at UCB, in January 2010, I knew that this was my thing. And by the time Glee Club happened, I was like, Oh, yeah. And then when that went well, I was like, Oh, okay. So this is the thing that I do. Like, I'm not professional or anything. But you know, our payment used to be, this used to be payment after every show, we'd get one drink at the bar from the proceeds. That happened for at least the first year that I was performing. And then I think it got a bit expensive at Glee and we stopped it. But yeah, um... So like, whilst I wasn't being paid for it, whilst I wasn't professional, I was like, Oh, this is my thing and I remember the sense of excitement every Thursday, leaving work knowing that I was going to go and do that thing. It was... Because it was the one time of the week I

can do it. It's not like now where I might be doing it multiple times a week. It was like crack. I needed to go back for another fix every Thursday. So I was hooked.

Richard Minkley 45:43

It was like crack. It ruined my life. No, I'm joking. Just, as a last quick one then, it's interesting hearing your explanation of that. Was there a social element to it as well? Because one of the fundamental things of the oral history is looking at the community side of it. And that doesn't necessarily mean it was a community back then, or that it felt like a community, but was there a social element to what was going on there?

Lloydie 45:46

I mean, no, it didn't. Definitely, because pretty much everyone, not always, but like pretty much everyone would go to the pub afterwards. And then like someone like Karl, for example, who was very much around the time of Glee one of those people that you know, was bedrock of Missimp. Like he'd give me a lift home or, you know, when I was living over Sneinton market. So yeah, there absolutely was a community element to it. You know, I'd moved to a new city and was working for a radio station and radio people are famous for only being interested in radio and only having radio as the thing that they you know, that's their social life. That's their group of friends. That's everything. And I was relatively unusual for the people that didn't have like families and kids. As a person in radio who, oh, wait, he has another thing. Actually, I had another thing as well because I also by that point had joined a choir but um, so I had like various social circles.

Richard Minkley 47:07

You're a renegade with more than one social circle, look at him go!

Lloydie 47:11

I know! Like in radio, a lot of people are so consumed with radio that, you know, that does happen, but there definitely was a social element about it, it gave me a whole new set of friends and, you know, people that, you know, I would, yeah, message or, you know, exchange gossip with all of that kind of stuff.

Richard Minkley 47:33

Right. This is very interesting, but we've come to the part where we're going to have a quick break, and I'm going to come back and talk about some more stuff. Thank you for your time, bear with us.

b) Part 2 of 2

23rd June 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

rhymes, glee, people, malt, improv, nottingham, bit, called, glee club, perform, form, scene, felt, stage, interesting, London, cross, teaching, Thursday, moved

SPEAKERS

Lloydie, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:01

Set up the recording again... Hello. Okay, we are back. It is four minutes past six on the 23rd of June 2020. And this is Richard Minkley interviewing Lloydie James Lloyd for the Missimp oral history project with little kitten Yoda on his knee there. I love it. Two quick things. This is more admin stuff, but it needs to be on the record. One, this oral history project is being run by a community interest company called The Curious Network, which both you and I are directors of. You're not running the project, you're just kind of helping with the corporate structure kind of stuff. Don't need to comment on that. I just wanted it on the record, but something I do need to comment on. Your name. Your given name, or birth name, I suppose is James Lloyd. Am I correct in thinking that, but you prefer to be called Lloydie.

Lloydie 01:00

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 01:00

Does your full name then become Lloydie James Lloyd, or are you James, quote Lloydie James Lloyd?

Lloydie 01:07

No quote marks. Lloydie is my chosen name. So... And that's how I prefer people to address me. So yeah, absolutely.

Richard Minkley 01:14

Fantastic. I just needed to clarify that one there. So, it's interesting, we were talking previously about the moment of the Glee Club. There is a... Between there and the next sort of marker in my head of where Missimp goes, is when things at the Glee Club begin to disintegrate. Do you remember when things- how the Glee Club...? In fact, let's focus on it a little bit. How do you feel the Glee Club changed the community or changed Missimp in those early days of The Glee Club?

Lloydie 01:58

These things are often, you know, both a blessing and a curse, and the fact that it kind of, you know, well, it still lasted a few years, but the fact that it didn't last longer is probably partly down to them, but it was definitely partly down to Missimp as well. I think initially, because they'd offered us Wednesday

nights and the reason we were doing- and we were doing that, plus we were doing our regular Monday, our regular monthly show at the Hopkinson as well at the time. And really, we should have just kind of picked one or the other. So either stay there, or to go to Glee. Wednesday night wasn't great for us. It was nothing else kind of, you know, really happening there. And we just weren't pulling in the numbers. And variety of reasons for that. And you know, some of it's marketing from us, some of it is the kind of stuff we were putting on. Some of it is marketing from Glee, and the fact that they were new. And they were really set up for stand up rather than improv, like a million things. And those just kind of wore away over time. I don't think Missimp really kind of adapted to the fact that it wasn't getting audience and thought, "what is our proposition?" in marketing terms, because it just was called Missimp In Action. I don't think that really means anything to anybody. And I think you can get away with that at a ramshackle venue for three quid but at a professional comedy club, where we're only charging about six quid admittedly, you probably can't, and it doesn't mean anything to somebody when you see it in a brochure, you know, next to big names like Gary Delaney, and you know, like, you know, Michael McIntyre did stuff, you know, tries out stuff at Glee. What does that mean to anybody and I think it, you know- We didn't have a proposition. We didn't, I don't think, try as hard as we could have done on the marketing, but equally I don't think Glee did either. And so it just became this... It became a relationship, really, where nobody was really trying their best. And nobody really knew what to do about the fact that they weren't trying their best. So yeah. So kind of that's how it happened. So, you know, there's no blame particularly on one side or another, I don't think. It just didn't quite work.

Richard Minkley 04:28

It's interesting. So there's a... You've described the kind of business angle there. But you also touched on how you felt it was... It didn't work having a Wednesday and a Thursday. Now, I think I'm kind of reading into what you said...

Lloydie 04:47

It was more that we were doing two shows a month. And at the time, what really was the difference between those two shows? In the end, actually, we were only doing the Glee show because Hopkinson changed and we weren't able to perform there anymore. And that happened before we finished at Glee. So by the end, Glee was our only monthly show. And, unlike at the Hopkinson, weren't really curating the kind of audience that we could, and really given that we... Admittedly, there was more comedy, you had Glee, at this time we had Glee, I think Jongleurs was still going, and you had Just The Tonic, all of which could give you stuff on a Friday or Saturday night. So it was a much more crowded comedy market at the time. We kind of were always marketed as a kind of comedy night. Um, so there are so many factors.

Richard Minkley 05:45

So how did it affect the... Because we haven't necessarily talked about it much, but you were also still doing drop ins... Was it still Jams, or were you Jam, scene, long form, mixing it up?

Lloydie 06:00

By that point, it had got more instructive. It was more like a drop in than it was a-

Richard Minkley 06:08

Really?

Lloydie 06:09

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 06:10

When did that happen? Like what happened there?

Lloydie 06:16

I guess... I mean, David did one or two. I think David originally... Trying to remember, I think he had probably done like one or two more instructive Thursday's, before I had done my, "I've come back from New York. Oh my god, I need to try something." Because I think that's what made me think that I could possibly do that, because I'd seen David do it, so there was precedent for it. And then after I'd come back again in the July, and I don't know why it merged over about, I don't know, maybe a year, into the fact that most Thursday's were, "yeah, we're going to learn a thing here."

Richard Minkley 06:58

That's interesting. What was it like- How did that... Because at this point, it still didn't feel like a community to you. It felt like a club.

Lloydie 07:09

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 07:10

I appreciate that this is kind of a blurred line. It's not a-

Lloydie 07:13

It's a really blurred line! Because everyone'll give you a different answer, because it's... Yeah, because at that point, it was also like, you basically had a... As Thursday started expanding and getting bigger, weirdly, our audiences at night were getting smaller. Which is a bit odd, really, when you think about it, because we were having more people come along on a Thursday. Shows, not so much. And thing is, because we had a Performance Team, and it was not very explicit who was in the Performance Team and who wasn't necessarily. There were regulars, and then there were some people who sometimes bought into it, but came along on a Thursday and it was never... Because nothing was really written down or anything like that, there was no bank account or anything. In fact, I remember having to take Nick Tyler to the bank in Beeston for us to set up a bank account, I think around the time probably that we started Glee, because they were going to need a method to pay us. And I'm pretty sure it's around that time we actually set it up as a community bank account. But before that, like that, you know... Who's on the Performance Team and it was, you know, that stuff wasn't written down or there was no constitution or whatever. Geoff tried a number of times and was very, ingloriously shouted down for wanting constitutions and bank accounts and accounts and things like that. But-

Richard Minkley 08:49

If I may-

Lloydie 08:50

Yeah, it's like, the Thursdays still didn't feel like a community but at that point, things were getting bigger and there was... Like, when I joined, you could come along on a Thursday, and chances are if you really wanted to, you could probably perform in a show. But once we were at Glee, there was like, "Ah shit, that show's probably going to have to curate our performers a bit more, because we're going to need to give them a good product. Because it's a professional comedy club." So that shifted things.

But at that point, it was not so much a community but more of a club that had kind of like a two tier membership, for want of a better expression.

Richard Minkley 09:31

It's interesting, but as you were describing there how Geoff wanted to, but he got shouted down. In this kind of club situation, I'm imagining due to the fact that they didn't want a constitution, there wasn't any sort of solidified, "this is who's in charge."

Lloydie 09:50

Mhm.

Richard Minkley 09:50

How did it work? Or like, who was the guy or? Yeah, what was the kind of guiding element to it? Because they must have talked to someone to set up their bank account, like you and Nick did, apparently. So, what-

Lloydie 10:06

Yeah, I wanted to make a bank account because we were like, "Oh, we really are gonna need one." And Nick agreed. Essentially, when I joined, Nick decided who played, who didn't, how it was run. Geoff had kind of taken a step back. He was the only founding member. And yeah, basically, Nick ran it.

Richard Minkley 10:28

Wow. That's interesting.

Lloydie 10:31

So if you're on stage, it was at Nick's behest.

Richard Minkley 10:39

I can imagine that one person having all of the decision making wasn't always a recipe for harmony. I'm not necessarily... I'm not trying to drag Nick through the mud or anything, but I'm imagining- Was there a sense of friction between one tier, with Nick kind of having control of a lot of things, and another tier, where-

Lloydie 11:00

There were a lot of people who wanted reasons why they weren't getting on stage. And to be fair, I would have probably made very similar decisions because there were quite a lot of people who weren't ready to be on the Glee stage. Now, when somebody is ready and isn't ready, I remember arguing for certain people and being told, I don't think they're ready, but we got them on anyway. And they ended up working out. I also remember arguing quite the opposite, saying, I don't think they're ready. And they turned out to be ready. It's like it, you know, like... It's performance, it's not an exact science. So someone does have to make those calls and they're hard to make. I was very lucky at the time to be on the right side of most of those things. In that I, you know, I'd had more training than most, I was, you know, also, you know, one of the most regular attendees, so I did quite well, but equally, you know, there was no... There was no outlet for other people who still wanted to perform. There was no smaller show or anything like that, there was no way of people developing stage time. So I think that did cause some people to, you know, harbor resentments. Definitely caused some

people to leave because they thought, "I should be on stage." Rightly sometimes, wrongly sometimes, in my opinion.

Richard Minkley 12:21

No, no, no, no, no, it's very well put, very well put. Okay, so we've talked a bit about the Glee Club coming to a close, and Yoda is having a big old stretch! That's history. History is that Yoda had a stretch at, like, quarter past six, sorry, easily distracted. So we were talking about... The next thing, there's a kind of weird period now where Missimp kind of hops from place to place a bit. I'm looking at the clock and I'm... I don't want to condense it too much, but I remember it went from Zoo TV. There was some time at the Zoo TV studio, I believe.

Lloydie 13:05

That's- White Collar Zoo, I think they were called, and Zoo TV was their product or something. And they had basically a place on Stoney Street, some office space that they'd converted partly into, like TV studios. And we basically used it as a workshop room. So we were there for a bit. When we were kind of homeless after Hopkinson saying-

Richard Minkley 13:26

It's interesting, you say you were there for a bit, it doesn't seem to... I'm reading a little bit into your answer, a little bit into what other people said it didn't seem like to develop the sense of being a home, even though- Is that fair to say or?

Lloydie 13:40

Yeah, oh, yeah, that's fair to say. We kind of just felt it was somewhere we turned up and did stuff but it felt... Yeah, we felt like outsiders there, a bit. Not that anyone wasn't friendly to us. They... I still most on who was there and I'm friends with someone who was there at the time. It's just that, it was their place that they were letting us use. And we had a room for a while. Our own room, the Blue Room, it was called, which was next door to Hopkinson's Gallery, whatever that building is, to the left of it. We paid for room, a month. And by that point I was teaching like level one, level two, level three. So I did that on a Tuesday, and we'd have the drop in on the Thursday, but it was just a little bit on the small side, because we were getting bigger by that point.

Richard Minkley 14:21

So you were teaching, were you teaching while you were still at the art organization? Because you would say, you said you were teaching in the Blue Room-

Lloydie 14:31

I'd done some workshops, but I don't think by the- I don't know. I think by the time I was teaching level one we might have... We might have left there. I think it was somewhere else.

Richard Minkley 14:45

Okay. So yeah, in fact, like, how did that come about, the idea of saying, "Let's do a course." Do you remember where that started? Or your earliest memory of it? Yeah, kind of...

Lloydie 14:58

Like I've done a fair bit of learning, I'd gone to Chicago to the Annoyance Theater in 2012 as well. I've done the UCB stuff, we'd had Chelsea come over, you know, Brandon was coming over. And I was, like, all of that stuff that had been learned, I really just kind of wanted a bunch of people to know it. I

mean, the cost of the courses was like peanuts. But weirdly, like I advertised them and we had a whole bunch of new people that came along.

Richard Minkley 15:32

Really?

Lloydie 15:34

So... Oh, yeah, yeah, the level one, the first level one I taught, I think, you know, the... I think Rayssa was on it. Was she the second one I did, or the first one I did? But like it was most people were new. Most of the people who were there weren't people that were already coming along on Thursdays, because I think they'd felt that I'd already passed on stuff to them. But it brought us in brand new people.

Richard Minkley 15:58

You said Rayssa, is this the same Rayssa who was in the vortex for a while? Yes. Oh, wow, I didn't realize she'd been around for that long. That's interesting.

Lloydie 16:09

And Ben did them as well. So yeah.

Richard Minkley 16:13

That's fascinating. Okay, so I'm just going to double check my notes just because my brain is rattling through which way we want to go next. In fact, yeah, so, you wanted to get these people there, but you had to actually set up a course. Like, yeah, what so... Yeah, how did that- How did you get that going? Like...

Lloydie 16:43

Well, because I had seen what a large long form improv community looks like, and I had experienced the buzz of long form, and I wanted to share it with other people. I wanted other people that could do it and I could perform with. There was nobody in the Midlands at all doing it at that time, like let alone teaching it, no one was performing regular long form shows in the Midlands. I mean, if you're going to travel to the nearest long form show, you'd have had to travel to London, you'd have to have got there on the right day. It's not like it is now. There were very few people doing that stuff. So I got as much advice from Brandon and Chelsea as I could, I assembled all of my notes, I, you know, I deliberately charged it cheap, because I thought, "this is not going to be, you know, the best teaching in the world right now." But I shared it, they went well, I refined them as I went along and discovered stuff that isn't working and what have you. And oh, my God, I most certainly wouldn't teach it like that anymore. But, you know, you only know what you know, and you don't know what you don't know. But, you know, it was the effort was to try and expand the community.

Richard Minkley 18:00

So what did you teach in it? Obviously you can't give me the breakdown right now. But what was the focuses in there?

Lloydie 18:09

Well, I mean, the level one was, you know, all of the improv basics. The, you know, getting your "yes, and", we'd talked about who, what, and where, we'd talked about, you know, relationships, status, emotion, you know, all of the kind of things that you would want in a level one. Lots of scene work.

Richard Minkley 18:28

I was about to say, so it was mainly... You said scene work. It could also be called long form rather than a game, kind of thing, or were there games-

Lloydie 18:37

The idea- And we did have some games mixed in there, but they were really, specifically designed to train certain things. But yeah, the idea was to help promote long form, because I think people can walk in and you know, play a game every day. A lot of people have tried playing Whose Line is it Anyway games at home or at parties and stuff like that. This is different though. It's more like acting, more like theater. Um, I just really wanted it to happen. And now, you know, and that was the beginning of, really, I think, you know, the style that we see now in terms of performance, the beginnings of, it's been obviously influenced by a lot of people. But that's kind of where it began. I was like, "I want to do this stuff. Does anyone want to do this stuff with me?"

Richard Minkley 19:29

How did it go down with... It feels wrong to call it "the establishment" because it doesn't sound like it's as established as you think. But how did it go down with what was already there, in the kind of club as we've described it?

Lloydie 19:43

Well, and there's some points I'll come to later, but I think the thing is, it was very hard for people who had spent you know, six weeks with me learning long form, to suddenly integrate into Thursdays. Partly they were doing it because it was either their Monday or Tuesday night, can't remember, I think it might be Mondays. But they were doing it because their Monday night was free. So like the Thursday night might not have been free. Also, the style of play, because at that point, there were still a lot short form and some open scenes, the style of play was very different. There was some quite aggressive players, which didn't necessarily give space to new people coming in who had learned a different way. As a result, yeah. We didn't have the kind of retention I would have really loved, I think, although, joy, Rayssa came back so, and you know, is still involved.

Richard Minkley 20:46

Yeah. Fantastic. So that was the first... Yeah, was that the first course that Missimp really ran, as far as you're aware?

Lloydie 20:59

As an actual course, yeah, I think they did do some weekends of like basics and things like that. I think Charlotte ran some of those. So I think that had been like little weekend, "Hey, learn an improv thing" or whatever. I think that had happened before but in terms of an actual, formal course with like, objectives and like...

Richard Minkley 21:17

Scene work, I imagine as well.

Lloydie 21:18

Yeah, I don't think that had ever happened before.

Richard Minkley 21:21

Okay. Yeah, there's... I'm gonna rattle through. I would have loved to kind of pick through the different places that Missimp went to after that, but there's a lot of things that happened in the next couple of years in different places. Tell me about Fisticuffs. How did that come about?

Lloydie 21:42

We were chatting. I think it was with Brandon Gardner. Maybe it was with Chelsea. I cannot remember which. But me and Martin were talking about it- No, it was with Brandon. I said to Brandon, "look, I'm not doing long form here. Here I am. I've taught a bit of it. You know, we do the occasional open scene in a show and stuff like that. But I'm not doing any long form." He was like, "well, are there people that you could form a team with?" And then Martin and I ended up chatting about wanting to do some kind of more organic, slightly more patient improv. And then Trilli was really up for it. And then Brendan, and we were like, right, there's four of us, let's do it. And we did a Fisticuff show as well. We did it upstairs in the Cross Keys, in the lace market.

Richard Minkley 22:30

Wow.

Lloydie 22:32

It was like, to my knowledge, we billed it as the first ever long form show in the Midlands. And people came across from Birmingham. There are about three people came across from Birmingham for it. And we were actually upstairs as you know, it's only small, so I think we had about 30 people there. But it was like-

Richard Minkley 22:49

Still, 30 people!

Lloydie 22:51

And I was bricking it, cuz I was like, "how's this gonna go down?!" And the Sunday before we had Heather Urquhart from the May Days come up and do some coaching with us. And our rehearsal was definitely better and funnier than our show. We had an okay show. I mean, I probably would hate see it and I'm glad it wasn't video'd, but like, we had an okay show, people that had a good time. It was all fine.

Richard Minkley 23:22

As a historian-

Lloydie 23:23

-edits. So, you know.

Richard Minkley 23:25

As a historian I'm very upset it wasn't recorded. However, we will soldier on. What format did you do in the show, was it literally just edits long form work or was there a thing-

Lloydie 23:39

I think we did a montage. I think. I wonder if Martin would remember better, but I think we did a montage and I remember we did a bunch of organic edits. And so we were kind of practicing swarm edits and things like that of someone coming on and everybody just matching it. So there was a particular scene with two knights. And I decided to come on making the sounds of a horse as if I was

going to get off a horse. And everyone just matched me and we were all galloping around the stage as horses. I was like, "Oh, I wasn't planning to edit! Buggar." But that was, you know, part of the-

Richard Minkley 24:17

Wait, so what's a swarm edit? I haven't heard that phrase before.

Lloydie 24:22

So someone will come, like- So, the classic example is, there's a scene, there's something about, you know, something says like, Oh yeah, it could be to do with all those bees. Bah bah bah bah, bah bah bah bah bah, someone comes on going "Bzzz" and starts moving around the stage, and someone else who's already on the stage starts going "Bzzz" then everyone just is a swarm of bees. And then everyone moves away and whatever is left, they start a new C. So it's a wanky, arty, organic style edit, I suppose.

Richard Minkley 24:58

Yeah, yeah. It sounds interesting, though.

Lloydie 24:59

They're good fun. I never use them. But they're good fun.

Richard Minkley 25:03

For the record, he was shaking his head while he said that. Moving on!

Lloydie 25:09

Genuinely, I've seen them used really well, I just haven't ever used them well in the show, well enough for me to go, "Oh, I want to use swarm edits." So yeah.

Richard Minkley 25:17

That's interesting. I've also heard rumor of a show, which I want to double check with you, where you took the first couple of scenes from a film or a script or a play, and then improvise the rest of the show. Did that happen?

Lloydie 25:32

Yes, that did happen. It was called "unspeakable acts". And I was never 100% comfortable with it as a show. I think we're always very influenced by the original bit of source material. Like for a while, we kind of almost did replays of the film, or at least we call back to it. Then we started using scripts of things that we've never seen before, which was easier. Never... Yeah, never really set me alight. Um, we had some fun ones but it never really stuck.

Richard Minkley 26:11

And was that the same group of people as Fisticuffs, or was it a new group of people?

Lloydie 26:16

Um, it was kind of born out of Fisticuffs, Trillie, and Brendan- The reason Fisticuffs only ever had one show was after that show about two, three months later, Brendan moved to... I think it was Manchester or Liverpool...

Richard Minkley 26:28

And this is Brendan Gardner?

Lloydie 26:31

No, Brendon... Brendon... No, not Brandon Gardner. He was the UCB teacher.

Richard Minkley 26:36

Okay, Brendan, who?

Lloydie 26:38

Brendan Curtis Burton.

Richard Minkley 26:39

I see, yes. You've brought his name up, yes.

Lloydie 26:41

And so Brendan moved there and Trillie moved to London. So we were in a situation where, "Oh, it's only me and Martin." So like, we called it Fisticuffs for a while, but it was basically just long form practice. It tended to happen on a Tuesday and unspeakable acts started happening in that various people start coming along. And kind of, it became... For a while it also became the kind of Glee performers, main performers, kind of like performer rehearsal, essentially. And we tried a variety of formats but yeah, unspeakable acts is one of them and never, never really quite jelled. Like we tried some, I think we tried some at Glee, but there was always something lacking in them. For me there was... I think we're almost sometimes hamstrung by the source material, but...

Richard Minkley 27:34

Hmm, that's interesting. Okay. I also... I've heard rumor of something called the... Is it not Nottingham city blues? There was some sort of I've heard rumor of some sort of blues show. Does this ring a bell to you? Some sort of police procedural blues show?

Lloydie 27:54

Oh, god, that was Eddie. You'd have to- Yeah, didn't he do some of those? He did. He did some of those, when we used to perform for a very short while at what is now the little bookshop up the alley.

Richard Minkley 28:06

Five Leaves.

Lloydie 28:08

Yeah. When we were performing there for a while, Eddie did a couple of those. Yeah. I can't remember how they went. He had very like, in a really brilliantly typical Eddie style, he had a very kind of set idea about what the formatic parameters were for it. I can't remember what they were. Oh, I remember! Yes. I remember playing coping it and most of what I said was "Yeah! I'm knarly!" I remember doing that in one of them. So I did perform in one, definitely.

Richard Minkley 28:43

Okay.

Lloydie 28:44

-as well. I kind of missed that space. I mean, that's the closest we ever got to kind of like having a nice... The stage was too small, but a nice, mini venue is lovely.

Richard Minkley 28:55

You know, I'm aware of time so I'm going to rattle through this little bit.

Lloydie 29:00

Well, I've got plenty, but you're the one that has to go through this.

Richard Minkley 29:04

Well, I think I may need to go a little bit long. But we... Long in terms of recording, not necessarily of how long we planned but... Because the thing I'm rushing towards is the Malt Cross and some of the more recent developments with not recent as in- Talking about City Blues, do you remember for example, what date- not what date, but kind of what time you were doing your first course in that blue room? Because and this is my fault on interviewer, I haven't been getting you up on dates.

Lloydie 29:40

So I... The very first course started in January 2013.

Richard Minkley 29:48

2013. Okay.

Lloydie 29:50

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 29:51

So, Zoo TV, I'll be able to look, because I believe some of their shows will be online. I'll be able to find a date there. Do you remember when your Fisticuffs show was? Like roughly what year? I'm not necessarily going to pin down the date but...

Lloydie 30:11

No, but I can do some digging around.

Richard Minkley 30:14

I can dig later. That's okay. I can dig later. Because the thing I'm double checking is that we don't miss anything before we barrel into the Malt Cross.

Lloydie 30:23

It might have been 2012 thinking about it, because that's when Brandon Gardner came over.

Richard Minkley 30:28

Okay. So, in that case, I'll stop beating around the bush. Do you remember your first experience of doing improv in the Malt Cross?

Lloydie 30:39

I remember us getting the Malt Cross. Because we were in... We were on Stony Street at the corner, which was perhaps not the most ideal space in the world. And Martin Berry again said to me, "there's a lovely rehearsal room at the Malt Cross that they've just done. And a workshop room." So first time I

did improv there was, or anything there, was when I held auditions for Rhymes Against Humanity in January 2016.

Richard Minkley 31:10

2016. Very interesting.

Lloydie 31:11

And Rhymes Against Humanity started using the small rehearsal room that used to be there, that became a record shop later on. We started using that end of January beginning of February 2016. I said to Missimp "Look, there's this workshop room, it's going to cost way more money than we're paying at the corner. But also we're paying shit all there and frankly, it's not the best environment to be bringing new people to." And so I think it was in the March 2016, we moved Thursdays to the Malt Cross as well.

Richard Minkley 31:47

Interesting. So, if you came in March 2016... Before we move on, then is there anything else that you think major happened to change the sort of shape of what Missimp was? In between, let's say, doing the- The end of the Art Org and moving to the Malt Cross, because it feels like there's lots of different places in there. But they don't seem to hold together like a chapter or big-

Lloydie 32:21

There were a lot of spaces and we went through a lot of stages. I mean, the courses helped definitely. Rhymes Against Humanity starting helped, because all of a sudden, we had a team that wasn't just Missimp. Missimp was always the team previously. It was, you know, well, actually, to be fair, Fisticuffs was a one off, as it turned out, but yeah, it was always like Missimp does this or, "ladies and gentlemen, Missimp!". Whereas Rhymes with something new. Because it was a specific team. I desperately wanted to do musical improv. I found Sam Plummer, and he was just this most talented eager man to do like something fun, so that's brought in some new people, again, because some people- We advertised it we had about 17 or 18 people audition. We took I think about eight or nine people in the, end, in total, including me and Sam, that is. But people like... People who might come along maybe occasionally on the Thursday, just ended up being great, like Trev for example. He was great, but never did a show with us.

Richard Minkley 33:36

Trev, do you remember Trev's surname?

Lloydie 33:39

I'll find it out for you.

Richard Minkley 33:41

Fair enough.

Lloydie 33:41

I can't. So yeah, um, so that suddenly again... I think the move to the Malt Cross firstly gave us somewhere that we could send people that was actually a nice space. We really hadn't had that, ever, really. Most of our spaces have been a bit scabby. They've been a bit like, "Oh, I better not crawl around on the floor, might get tetanus" kind of thing. So, um, this was like a nice space. Secondly, at the same time as that happening, we'd already got courses that had run. Thirdly, all of a sudden, a

team was forming, a new musical team, which was new, this is like- And then literally a year after, exactly a year after Rhymes forms Vox Pops form. It was January 2017. So I knew things were happening. And all of that kind of happened at once, and all of the kind of run up to it, with Glee, with courses, with you know, new people kind of floating in and about, all of that kind of came to the point I do think 2016. Like during 2016 is when it's starting to feel more like a community. Like, stuff... Everything was at the time as well pretty much was happening at the Malt Cross as well. So it felt like there was a hub, and a home.

Richard Minkley 35:06

Mm hmm. That... That's very interesting. I'm going to lay my cards on the table a little bit, because I'm looking at what we've talked about. And it feels like after 2016 there is only a couple of years, but a lot gone into those years. So, I'm not going to try and jam in all that time into this interview. Hopefully, I'll be able to interview you again, if that's something you're into. I'm not asking you to confirm that now, because that'd be a really harsh thing to do. But-

Lloydie 35:39

I'm quite happy to confirm it now.

Richard Minkley 35:41

Yeah, let's... There's so many things there that we need to dig into. I'm going to quickly make a note of one of them now. There's so many things there, but I need to go to quite a small one that keeps coming up at- Well, he's not small. He's actually quite a tall man. But Martin Berry keeps appearing in Missimp's story in a very... Because I never- So, sorry, I'm getting a bit scrambled here, because I know Martin Berry as a theatre person, rather than an improv person, but he keeps popping up around Missimp. Was he a part of...? I mean, was he a part of either the community or this kind of club feeling that we've been talking about? Or was he sort of adjacent to Missimp?

Lloydie 36:33

Both him and his other half Katherine came along. They came along... Probably in... Yes, it would have been in the first year that I was there. So they must have come along in probably late 2009. And they used to come pretty regularly, you know, just for a little while. Because I remember him saying to me before I went to UCB in 2010 "Ooh, come back with some good games, won't you?" Little did I know that that's not what I was coming back at all. I remember him saying that. And so it would have been late 2009 that they started coming along. And again, they were- Like when they came along, it was like, "Ooh, hang on", because they've got theatre backgrounds and they'd come into things, and like, even if they didn't get all the rules, or whatever it is, like, "Ooh, they can hold their own". And then I remember them coming along to when Heather and Joe came and did musical improv workshops for us. They came along to at least one of those. So, and the first of those would have been in around 2012, something like that, December 2012, or 13, they first come along, so they used to do like several times they came and did music with us.

Richard Minkley 37:48

So would they have performed with the Glee Club because we're kind of jumping over a couple of things there.

Lloydie 37:55

I don't know whether Martin performed at Glee, but- oh, hang on, I'm gonna have to- I've got the wrong thing plugged in and the computer's running short.

Richard Minkley 38:03

Oh no.

Lloydie 38:05

So I don't think that they'd have ever performed. I don't remember them performing at Glee, but they definitely performed at Hopkinson, and they were definitely in the 24 hour improv.

Richard Minkley 38:13

And of course, he directed HR's Days Night.

Lloydie 38:20

Yes. And, like he's been along a couple of times and, you know, cast an eye over what Rhymes Against Humanity are doing and offered musical theater perspectives, because obviously, he used to be a West End performer. And, obviously, now he runs the participation department at the Nottingham Playhouse and I am a freelance artist that he sometimes calls on to be part of the participation departments to do improv things.

Richard Minkley 38:48

Yeah, that's, it's interesting because, also a lot of the points where I've heard about Martin Berry coming in, it isn't necessarily- For example, we've talked about Geoff and Nick making these kind of bigger decisions. It seems that he is a connection between a much broader cultural scene in Nottingham.

Lloydie 38:48

Oh yeah.

Richard Minkley 38:49

That's the impression I'm getting at the minute. Is that a fair way to describe it?

Lloydie 39:14

Yeah. And like he wasn't around for that long. Mores pity because I used to really enjoy playing with him. Although every now and again, if I'm doing a workshop for him, he will step in and do a thing and I'm like, "agh!" But, it's more like I've just always stayed in touch with him and he's like, had me go and do improv things at Stagecoach in Loughborough, he used to do teaching there, and he's called me in to do various things basically, and said, would I be interested, which is really nice.

Richard Minkley 39:48

Sorry, I was going to say- What's...? I'm just going to think about the best way to ask this question, because I find it interesting that he keeps cropping up. You've said that he helped you get access to the Malt Cross?

Lloydie 40:04

Well, he just suggested it.

Richard Minkley 40:05

Did he suggest it, is that the-

Lloydie 40:08

Well, I was looking for somewhere for Rhymes to rehearse, and I didn't want to use the Corner bluntly because, well, it's not an ideal space. And so I just emailed him and I said, "Hey, how you doing? I'm really looking for space. I'm setting up a musical improv group. A, I know you like musical improv, do you fancy like being a part of it?" And he was like, "ah, too busy." He said, "but you want to check out what the Malt Cross have got, go and have a look and go and speak to them." So I did.

Richard Minkley 40:33

Let's go into that then. Because there's also... Yeah, which came first, meeting Sam Plummer, or Rhymes Against Humanity?

Lloydie 40:46

Well, in my head, I always wanted to do improvised musicals, certainly some musical improv of some sort, because we'd had musicians in the past. Pete Allott used to play very occasionally, for us, for a Glee show.

Richard Minkley 41:02

was that pea as in P-E-A or Pete as in P-E-T-E?

Lloydie 41:05

No, Pete, P-E-T-E. Allott, A double L, O, double T, I think. And he played for us in a few Glee shows, because we did once with what Hether and Joe had taught us the love ballad. There's me, Trillie, I think it was Marilyn possibly. Was it Kat? I can't remember, no, I think it might be David. Can't remember the fourth person but anyway, we did a love ballad and it was the Glee show where we had the largest number of people there, purely by chance. 20 performing arts students were there. We had 90 in total. And we sang, I think the song was called Hollyoaks For The Love. That was the chorus anyway, and it just slayed. And... Yeah, so we'd had Pete and he'd played for that. And then he'd moved away, and I just- You know, I found Sam Plummer through radio means really, he was a student radio person. And he gave me a tour of the student radio station, because I wanted to see one of the local student radio stations. I tried to make a point of going to all of them. And I hadn't seen Demon in Leicester, I went there, and then had a beer with him afterwards. And he said, "Oh, no, I play piano." I was like, "really?", he goes, "yeah, I taught myself, kind of learnt by ear." I was like, "...really?", leant in a bit. "I'll send you some stuff." And he did. And then like he came and he, like, did some bits and bobs on some evenings where there were a few improvisers around. And I was like, "I think we can do something with this." And so I said to him, "Look," we sat in Nattajacks in Leicester. I said, "do you...? Do you want to set up a musical improv group? Like, this is what it will entail." And he said, "Yeah, let's give it a go." So that's kind of how it came about. I'd wanted to do it for ages, but I just never knew whether we'd find a musician or not.

Richard Minkley 43:06

That's interesting as well, that he came from Leicester. So that's very interesting. So when did- So that's when you met Sam. How did that then turn into having an audition at the Malt Cross? Well, we know it came because you were going to organize an audition, but when did that become..? Go from you initially to "Hey, there's this thing, everyone come and join in."

Lloydie 43:32

So we tried, we got in together with a few improvisers, and we did like some hoedowns and some other bits, things like scenes into songs and stuff. And we did three or four weeks of that or whatever.

And we were just like "no, I think we can make this work. Let's give it a go. Let's like build it slowly. But let's give it a go." And we did build it slowly because we did... Apart from doing a couple of scenes into songs I think at some guerrilla burgers, the first time Rhymes took to the stage, we'd been rehearsing every week for 10 months, nine months. It was like October, we were the opening act of the Playhouse for... I can't remember probably Star Wars or whatever. And we weren't the main attraction. We just like went on first. And we didn't have our first ever improvised musical of thank God for Tim Sniffen who came and coached us, but we'd been going over a year before we had a show where we actually were like, "this is Rhymes Against Humanity, come see us". We had spent a year in rehearsal before we advertised ourselves.

Richard Minkley 44:39

So many things go to into there. Firstly, you played the Playhouse. Was it the- I'm assuming it's the Neville Studio.

Lloydie 44:46

Yeah, it was the Neville Studio.

Richard Minkley 44:47

Okay. And Tim Sniffen, do you remember when he came along to coach you? I believe you said he was-

Lloydie 44:57

Yeah, so he plays with Baby Wants Candy the improvised musical, who are originally a Chicago team and they've got teams in Chicago, LA, and New York. Tim, I met through a mutual friend at the Edinburgh Fringe and everybody I knew- I knew a few people that knew him said he was wonderful coach. He did an intensive weekend with Rhymes Against Humanity, which included him guesting in a show with us, and what he taught- And he'd already been sending me a few notes of like, try this in rehearsal. Try this in rehearsal, so we were primed. What he did in that weekend was miraculous, nothing short, miraculous, and the show that we have today, that, you know, I'm glad to say does very well, so much of it is down to that one weekend where he cemented so much with us.

Richard Minkley 45:40

What, obviously, again, you can't give me an entire weekend in a shboom. But what did you learn on that weekend?

Lloydie 45:49

He really taught us how to do a narrative musical, how to set up a protagonist and antagonist, and how to also, you know, in terms of how to do an eye catching opening number. There was a whole load of stuff. And he just helped us. Like we had a lot of the component parts, not least because both him and a few other people I know had said try this, try this. And I was also passing on knowledge that I've got from being in the May Days as well. But he solidified it, he joined the dots, he tied it together. And he worked with us as a unit, as a team, and had us functioning together. We felt like team at that point.

Richard Minkley 46:32

Wow.

Lloydie 46:34

Rather than a collection of individuals doing musical improv.

Richard Minkley 46:37

The chronology has gone a bit all over the place, but I need to kind of bring us back a little bit. No, no, no, it's the nature of the beast. How... So, one of the things I'm aware of is this growing feeling. Like you described it that it wasn't until we kind of really hit the Malt Cross that it became a community. And I'm interested, do you feel that Rhymes Against Humanity was something that came about within Missimp? That was adjacent to Missimp? Or the two things were completely separate?

Lloydie 47:12

Well, I mean, and this is the thing with historical things with Missimp. So little was written down or codified. It was just like, "Oh, I'd like to set up a thing." "Okay, do a thing." And then, "it's performing under Missimp." "Oh, is it? Okay, fine." Um, so, yeah. Who really knows?

Richard Minkley 47:34

That's interesting.

Lloydie 47:37

I mean, we were seen as a Missimp team. We were seen as something that had happened from within Missimp. But we always paid our own way essentially. So in the first year, everyone in Rhymes paid subs, because there was no subsidy for the room or anything from Missimp at all. Rhymes paid its own way completely.

Richard Minkley 48:04

That's interesting, because... I'm gonna- Sorry, this question is, I'm trying to thread the needle a little bit, but you're describing it as a part of Missimp, and you played under Missimp, but at the same time, nothing was really codified. So did it still kind of feel like that club? Was it a community or was there- Because it feels like community doesn't necessarily cover it from the conversation we've had. But at the same time, I'm not necessarily sure that club is the way to describe it either. What was Missimp in that pre Malt Cross? I believe you described it as being a... Like between, what, 2013 when you start doing courses and 2016, when we got Malt Cross, you described kind of coming together or coming to a point.

Lloydie 49:00

Yeah... I mean, it was... I mean, it was growing. But it didn't really have a home. And it was, it was kind of... It was finding what it was, I suppose. I mean, you could argue it still is, but like it was... Yeah, it finding a home at the Malt Cross, I think made it feel- So you know? Yes. Okay. Rhymes happened on a different day. But a lot of those people also went to Thursday, or when you know, maybe just a gorilla burger or whatever. And when there was like a show, whatever, then, you know, it will be produced by Missimp and Rhymes would perform. So it was part of that kind of club, I suppose. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 49:47

That's interesting. So... I'm trying to think if there's anything else I need to ask you about this period. But yeah... It seems interesting then. So... To go into it a little bit more then... Sorry, my brain is, there's- Sorry my brain has kind of gone, "Oh wow. Let's talk about 1000 different things at once." Because I'm looking at this and thinking, you know, Rhymes Against Humanity is a substantial part of the Nottingham scene and it there's clearly a genetic connection- well, genetic is a strong word, a

connection with Missimp even though it is kind of one foot in one foot out, to be in this weird, amorphous, misty... How did you describe it with your life coach and a misty veil?

Lloydie 50:41

Oh, a misty curtain.

Richard Minkley 50:43

It feels like a lot of things here are misty. Yeah, what was it like? Pushing away from Missimp a bit into Rhymes and what was it like pushing that direction?

Lloydie 51:01

Well, originally Rhymes was, you know, operated under the banner of Missimp. And there were some discussions when we started doing our monthly shows in January 2017, whether we should have a separate bank account or not, or whatever, and we didn't in the end. So they were always still under the banner of Missimp. But we were a team that suddenly started doing monthly shows, or we were hoping would be monthly shows actually at the Actors Studio on Kayes Walk, which is lovely little studio space, which we only got to use a few times, sadly. We'd really wanted those to kind of be monthly shows. And that was the idea, that we'd do kind of monthly stuff, because that's how we'd get better, by being in front of an audience an awful lot. And there was some pushback on that. "You can't do monthly shows, you'll take away all the audience from everyone else," which was nonsense. Completely nonsense. But we sold them all out. But then it was a 30 seater, so! Or a 35, maybe. So, you know, um, but it was very nice, and it started selling out in advance, which created a bit of like, "Oh, you have to book your ticket sir because otherwise they'll sell out." So that kind of created a bit of a buzz which was really useful for us. And then add Playhouse shows that the Neville used to sell out. Haven't even talked about genesis at the Playhouse-

Richard Minkley 52:31

Honestly there's so- This is why I'm saying I'm not trying to- Because we haven't even really breached 2016 yet. Not really.

Lloydie 52:38

I know, I know.

Richard Minkley 52:38

There's so much. I'm gonna bring this to-

Lloydie 52:43

I'll tell you how the Playhouse came about. But not now, obviously.

Richard Minkley 52:46

Well, part of this is... The nature of the beast that- This isn't a complete oral history, but one of many, maybe many that there- Someone else-

Lloydie 52:56

Yeah, sure.

Richard Minkley 52:57

But to bring us to a close, there are kind of... Yeah. The main question that I want to end on, trying to keep in mind this period of time from 2009 when you first turned up to now 2016-ish. It's a question of why you kept coming back. And we said in about, oh, it would have been 2010, we talked about it and you described it as this kind of like. That's when we talked about your life coach and kind of understanding what was behind the misty veil. In the next six years, why did you keep coming back after that, and did it change from that misty veil understanding of yourself?

Lloydie 53:47

Oh, well. Why did I keep coming back after what, exactly?

Richard Minkley 53:52

After the Glee Club, you've been through a lot, but you've kept coming back and doing stuff with Missimp, rather than spiraling off to do something else, or leaving, or you know. There's a lot of people over those six years who came, did some stuff and left. But you didn't. I'm interested in why you kept coming back.

Lloydie 54:15

Because by that point, I knew that I wanted... I knew that Nottingham already had, you know, a larger improv community than most cities. And I had seen what- I'd seen some of the good things that a large improv community can do. There were also a lot of downsides to it as well. And whilst I never wanted it to be as big as you know, what I saw in New York, what I really wanted was a community... Or not even a community, an improv scene in the city, where I was not just performing because I love performing improv, but where I could go and see a show and be inspired. I wanted us to be like, you know, I wanted this city to be so on fire with improv, they're like, "Oh, I'm going to check out that show, those people are doing really interesting stuff. I want to see that." I wanted that, rather than having to go to New York or Chicago, less so London, but certainly like, you know, those cities with exciting scenes that really leave me buzzing. Like I wanted, I wanted to be inspired by other stuff because I was often in the big shows. And that's fine. And that's all very nice. But I want to go watch some stuff as well. I want to be inspired. I want to be entertained. I love watching improv, as well as doing it. And when you're in the city where you're in most of the big shows, you're there going, "Yep, I need feeding too."

Richard Minkley 55:53

You know what, I was ready to end the recording there but you've just thrown something in at the last moment which I would like to sort of expand on. You said, you want to be inspired like places like in New York and Chicago. And then you said less so London?

Lloydie 56:09

Yeah, um, several reasons. Firstly, I mean, London does have a very large scene. But um, and there are some brilliant groups in London, by the way, but I am... London has developed in a different way to New York, which has developed in a different way to Chicago, like... And I actually think there are some cities like Brighton and Nottingham, where the consistency of show is actually slightly better than it is in London. And part of that is there are more opportunities to get stage time in London. So as a result, you're more likely to see some stuff that isn't as fully formed. That's slightly different on some of the main things Saturday nights and things like that, like if you go to certain places, but because London have so many indie nights as well as other nights, it's, you know, it's a bit more patchy. You could say that, to be fair, about New York and Chicago as well. But I think there is a better consistency of show in terms of who gets on stage in Nottingham than there is in most cities in the UK.

Richard Minkley 57:32

Very interesting because you also compare it to Brighton. Do you have an idea of what it is-? You've described the London scene having a lot of opportunities, a lot going off there. And obviously not all of it is going to be the top tier. But what is it with Brighton and Nottingham that makes it different?

Lloydie 57:51

Oh, I mean, it's pluses and it's minuses. I alluded to this earlier on when I said well, there was you know, there was a chance for the top people to perform at Glee, but nowhere else for anyone else to perform. There's an amount of gatekeeping, because if you're going to get a venue and you're going to get an audience, then there are only so many places that you can go with, there are only certain performers you can use. In London, there are so many rooms above pubs and things like that. And there are so many improvisers who are doing so many improv courses. It's easier to find yourself a little night that your team of six people who've been learning it for two months can suddenly go and do a show. And it's new and it's exciting. It gives you stage time, which is hugely valuable. And that is a resource that people don't necessarily get here. So, in terms of Nottingham, in terms of someone who's studying improv, that is a bit of a downside. If you are an audience coming to see improv, however, in Nottingham, you're more likely to see a good show than if you go to a random improv event in London. So it's plusses and minuses and it's how you kind of manage both expectations of new performers and also expectations of audiences.

Richard Minkley 58:57

I could sit here and talk to you for hours and hours and hours. And I'm sure that that may happen again soon, but for now-

Lloydie 59:03

I hope so! I like talking about it.

Richard Minkley 59:06

Yeah, honestly, honestly fascinating, but I'll leave it there. Thank you so much for your time. And thank you Yoda for being just a charming little child having a snuggle. Oh! Okay, thanks.

7. Mark Tughan

7.1. Interview 1 of 2

a) Part 1 of 1

29th June 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

nottingham, glee, big, club, bit, comedy, people, glee club, improv, acts, Birmingham, opening, London, oxford, comedy festival, comedy club, case, community, set, business

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Mark Tughan

Richard Minkley 00:00

Fantastic. So it is 11:47 on the 29th of June 2020. I'm Richard Minkley interviewing Mark Tughan, is it Tughan?

Mark Tughan 00:02

It's pronounced "Tughan".

Richard Minkley 00:03

Tughan. Right.

Mark Tughan 00:03

Yeah, yeah, that's it.

Richard Minkley 00:03

I keep missing out letters when I'm writing down the name, so I have to make sure. But yeah, fantastic. So I'm going to dive straight in with the first question, which is, what is your first memory of Missimp? If you have such a thing?

Mark Tughan 00:36

Well, before we even opened the Nottingham Glee, you know, obviously, I was aware that I was planning an opening. And, you know, part of my job is to look both in the city and in the whole country for things that I think would be a good thing for us to be doing. And I've always liked a bit of improv myself. It's always been something that I think over years has struggled in clubs. But I'm not sure quite how I found out about it. But I found out about Missimp in Nottingham. I tracked down a show. And one night I bought a ticket just like anybody else. Nobody knew who I was, I went and saw the show. And I liked it. And it's always, you know, to cut a long story short, the rest is history. I approached them saying "Do you want to do it in the Glee?" And I think if I remember rightly, they didn't quite sort of bite my arm off, but they went, "Yeah, we'd love to." And they were there, I think they were there right at the very beginning of the Glee, so we're talking 2010. And, you know, 2010 to, gosh, it was really 2010

all the way up to about 2016, where I would say, you know, troubled times, for both the Nottingham Glee and the Glee as a whole, because the Nottingham Glee did not get off to as good to start as I hoped. And there's another bit of history that is really the reason why I think that happened. And that was because, you know, we tried to open a new venue called Glee at a time when there was a TV phenomenon on Sky called Glee. I don't want to necessarily get into the whole sort of legal action thing but I did spend six years defending our name and our rights in that context.

Richard Minkley 02:43

Wow.

Mark Tughan 02:44

It was a difficult time but you know, those guys came in and put their shows on. And they were a part of the Glee pretty much almost from the point the doors opened.

Richard Minkley 02:56

Yeah. Wow. That is a fantastic story- Sorry, carry on.

Mark Tughan 03:01

I mean, I just approached them because, you know, I liked improv. And I saw those guys as a really good example of it. I mean, let's face it, we've all seen bad improv.

Richard Minkley 03:16

Some of us have taken part in bad improv as well.

Mark Tughan 03:20

And that's why I kind of went incognito because the last thing I wanted to do is to approach them and go, "Well, of course, I need to come and have a look at you first." And then "Oh, oh dear, now I've had a look at you, forget that." I came along and I actually thought it was really very good. And that's why I went ahead with it.

Richard Minkley 03:41

There's so much to dive into there. To start off with, what do you remember of that show where you came in incognito, as you said, to kind of see what they were like, do you remember anything of it?

Mark Tughan 03:57

So it's a long time ago because it literally is sort of 10 years ago to the year. But, you know, I mean, obviously, knowing a little bit about improv, I knew what to expect in the first place. And they were just a good example of it. Maybe, you know, sometimes it can be that particular night, but it was working that night, and it was funny. And it was, you know, the crowd, were having a lovely time and the performers were having a lovely time and the things that they were doing were broadly working. So it was just, you know, it was just a pleasure to be in that audience at that time.

Richard Minkley 04:34

It's interesting. Do you remember the space at all? Like where they were doing it? I appreciate that's a specific question.

Mark Tughan 04:41

It was near the railway station. It was on a little side road not far from the Nottingham railway station. And it was, I wouldn't quite say it's sort of a side street but it was a street off the main drag. And I seem to remember you sort of went in and I don't remember whether it was upstairs or downstairs. But it was quite a sort of a warehouse-y feel.

Richard Minkley 05:04

Yeah, that's interesting. So you saw them, I think you said you don't remember how you got introduced to Missimp, or found out about it, this kind of comes into-

Mark Tughan 05:19

I'm pretty sure it would have been just me scouring the listings in Nottingham for things that I think and thought were taking place. Whether or not the Glee would be sort of a good place for them to come to really so, I mean, it's part of my job to know what else is going on in the city. Not necessarily in huge detail, but...

Richard Minkley 05:44

So there's an interesting point there because you are... I don't know whether you were scouring the country- Oh, sorry, have you got-

Mark Tughan 05:49

Somebody's just come into the office, which is nice.

Richard Minkley 05:55

In the lockdown that must be a lovely surprise! But, yeah, so it's interesting because you're talking there about coming into Nottingham, and I know you set up Oxford at a roughly similar time.

Mark Tughan 06:11

A very similar time, Oxford was sort of April, May. And Nottingham I think was September. It was a big deal for us doing two clubs in one year. But-

Richard Minkley 06:21

So to kind of- Oh, sorry, carry on.

Mark Tughan 06:23

I was just gonna say it was a big deal for us doing two in one year, but Oxford was a situation in which we didn't really have to... Our name was not on the lease, it was a JV with another operator, and there wasn't a huge amount of work involved with, for example, fitting it out, whereas in Nottingham, you know, we had builders in for months and months and months and spent an awful, probably far too much money, on that venue. But yeah, it was a big deal to do two. Because we basically doubled the number of clubs in one year.

Richard Minkley 06:58

Yeah. So to kind of work from the broadest sense and then narrow into Nottingham. You're doing... I mean, it seems dramatic to say it, but were you doing a national search for some where to set up clubs? Or was it sort of more... It happened to be that you... Because I know you already had some connections with Nottingham from going to university here. Like, I believe you... I looked at your LinkedIn. So if you graduated from NTU in 1990, it would have been, yeah, 10 years later. No, 20 years. Yeah, it would have been-

Mark Tughan 07:36

Well, I graduated 1990, it was the uni.

Richard Minkley 07:39

Yeah, so 20-

Mark Tughan 07:40

I lived in Lenton and all that kind of stuff. No, to be honest, there was a lot of... There wasn't opportunism going on there because what was really happening behind the scenes was that the biggest chain of comedy clubs, namely Jongleurs, went bust, taking with them basically all their locations. And, you know, to the extent that there was a huge amount of science involved, I simply looked at what I thought were the successful Jongleurs clubs. And I mean, again, there's a shocking lack of science involved in it. I chose Nottingham because of my historic connection to Nottingham. I chose Oxford because Oxford was very well liked and respected amongst the comics as a great club. There were a couple of other of the jongleurs sites which were also liked and respected by the acts, namely Leeds and Glasgow. We've now got the Glasgow site as well. But if I have a regret, maybe, you know, I wanted to gradually grow out from the core, which is Birmingham. You know, in hindsight, if I'm really honest, you know, probably the smarter business decision would have been to pick Glasgow and Leeds. But back then, it was also a case of what we could do, what we were capable of financing. You know, Oxford obviously didn't involve a lot of money for us. Nottingham did. So for example, I couldn't have done Nottingham and Leeds, couldn't have afforded that. So I picked Nottingham and Oxford because, you know, Nottingham was close to Birmingham and so was Oxford. And I didn't have to spend any money on Oxford, so.

Richard Minkley 09:43

So is that the kind of factors that led to The Glee Club in Nottingham? It was close to Birmingham. And you already had-

Mark Tughan 09:53

A historical connection to Nottingham? Yes. Yes.

Richard Minkley 09:56

That is a fascinating fact there.

Mark Tughan 09:58

Yeah, there was definitely a little bit of history and emotion involving me wanting to set up in Nottingham. But look, don't get me wrong, I also wanted to set up a club, you know, 60 miles away, that I felt would be very, very easy- I mean, imagine us doing Glasgow back then. I think that would have been quite a big deal, you know, setting up another club 300 miles away as opposed to 60.

Richard Minkley 10:23

So is that a consideration? Because, I mean, one of the things I'm aware of is that I'm looking at a lot of these issues from a community perspective. But it seems that on the business end, you're suggesting that the geography, literally the distance, is a big impact on owning clubs. It's not just about finding a building, it's about the distance between the buildings or something.

Mark Tughan 10:47

Well, at the time, I thought that was really important. But if I'm really honest, I think realistically it was probably... I shouldn't have let the geography be that big of a consideration. Yes, I was led in the case of Nottingham, it was definitely a little bit too emotional, if I'm really honest.

Richard Minkley 11:09

That's fair. So in that case, it suggests that quite an important thing, do you remember any of the comedy scene back in '90, around, it was '87 to 1990 in Nottingham, do you remember the comedy scene back then?

Mark Tughan 11:27

No, no, when I was a student in Nottingham '87 to '90, I was not really aware of any particular comedy scene in Nottingham. In the sense that, you know, I come from Northern Ireland, so I was a student at Nottingham University, and in the holidays, for example, I used to go back to London, because I had taken a year off before I went to Nottingham uni and I've got a sort of a network of friends and pals in London and when the holidays came along, I would obviously sometimes I would go home to Northern Ireland, other times I would go back to London and do jobs in London. But my comedy was satisfied by, at the time back in '87 to '95 visits to the Comedy Store in Leicester Square. I wasn't aware of even any pub comedy taking place, not as far back as '87 to '90, but I'm conscious that come 1994, just the tonic were getting '94, '95, just the tonic were getting set up in Nottingham.

Richard Minkley 12:32

Yeah, I don't know if they still, I'll have to double check that, it's hard to know if anything still exists in Nottingham during lockdown. It feels like everything might fall off the map.

Mark Tughan 12:40

Yeah, tell me about it!

Richard Minkley 12:45

That's interesting. I feel like I'm still trying to understand, if you were going to put a word to describe that emotional connection to Nottingham, what would it be? Because every time I asked you about Nottingham, it feels like you've got more reasons why it's a bad idea, which is fascinating, very fascinating.

Mark Tughan 13:06

I suppose it's partly clouded by the fact that, you know, that club is the only one that has been... I mean, it's doing very well now, but it took a long time to get going. And, you know, the reasons for that were twofold. One was the fact that I think it proved very, very difficult to get a comedy club called Glee going right at the very peak of Glee mania on TV. I mean, I remember interviewing two or three marketing agencies, and all of them were, it was a big eye opener for me, because all of them took me aside and, you know, they knew that I knew that there was this issue going on with the TV show, but all three of them took me aside and went, "Mark, I don't really actually know that you appreciate how serious this is."

Richard Minkley 13:59

Wow.

Mark Tughan 14:01

Unfortunately, I think had I taken it as seriously as I should have, I probably should have postponed or delayed the pressing the button on Nottingham until I cleared... Until the Glee mania died down and I had a fighting chance of getting a club going. The second issue that I was going to refer to is that, you know, even though Jongleurs had gone bust, and I was hoping to just capture all the business goodwill attached with Jongleurs going bust, particularly having gone into the same premises as them. Jongleurs quickly reestablished under a sort of bizarre franchising arrangement and managed to get open in another location before we did so. And if truth be known, I also sort of underestimated just how much they would fight for their market share. And sure enough, you know, I expected them to be a competitor operating upstairs above a pub. But they managed to also get hold of a giant basement premises, so commercially it became a bit of a... A city like Nottingham which is obviously not a tiny city but it's by no means is a giant metropolis. It's not a Birmingham, it's not a Manchester, it's not a London, it's not a Glasgow, but for it to have basically three, you know, and we're talking all three of us had three or 400 seats to offer on a Saturday night. We all got ourselves into position whereby nobody made any money for quite a long time. It's fraught with both emotion and... Not regret, because it came around and I'm glad I've got that club now, but my god, it was the problem child.

Richard Minkley 16:02

Yeah, it's interesting comparing, because it kind of falls a little bit outside the oral history, but we've, Missimp, also had the problem of being like, there is a capacity limit in Nottingham for how much you can put on. And there's also an added capacity for improv and how much you can put on with an improv audience. So, yeah, I imagine there's some people in the community who would understand your pain with that. But yeah, that's interesting. So...

Mark Tughan 16:31

Yeah, I know.

Richard Minkley 16:33

Then at a certain point, you were like, right, we're going with Nottingham. You said you were doing building work, you were looking for acts. Now you said you were kind of scouring the community. Your name came up a lot most in conjunction with Helen Stead of the Nottingham Comedy Festival.

Mark Tughan 16:52

Okay, yeah.

Richard Minkley 16:53

I'm interested, did things like... The question is, do things like a Local Comedy Festival help bring these bigger... I was going to say organizations but effectively businesses like Jongleurs, The Glee Club, Just The Tonic into a city, because the thing I'm trying to balance in my head is, where a community intersects with a bigger business and an organization and a kind of national economy as it were. So how important are things like the Nottingham Comedy Festival or comedy communities when you're trying to consider where you could set up?

Mark Tughan 17:40

They're not the decisive factor, in the sense that, you know, of my list of criteria when I decide where I'm going, whether or not there is a big festival, for example, or a comedy festival in that city is not a decisive factor because remember, I set up a club in 1994 and it wasn't really- I mean, there was a Birmingham Comedy Festival, but it soon collapsed. But the fact that there was a Glee there, the fact that there is a Glee Club in any city, basically helps to sort of, you know, in the sense that there are

seeds, it helps to water those seeds because it, you know, a Glee is never there in isolation. It's the big one. It's the commercial thing. It's always great that there is a wider community of comedy taking place, whether or not it is improv or what I would call your room above pub, function room comedy, taking place there. In no way do I regard room above pub or function room comedy, as you know, competitive. Certainly don't regard a comedy festival as a, you know, a competitive type thing. I think having that... "Ecosystem" is a good word. Having that ecosystem is probably helpful. If you see what I mean, to having a comedy scene, and in particular a Glee Club, but I wouldn't say it's decisive one way or the other in the sense that without wishing to seem as sort of being arrogant about it, if there was no comedy scene in, say for, which isn't going to happen now because there's a comedy scene everywhere, but we were back in the 90s, if there wasn't a comedy scene, and I set up the Glee Club, there would be a comedy scene happening in pubs and function rooms, probably within two or three years anyway. Because it's just, it's just life. That's how we encourage other people to want to put on and produce other events.

Richard Minkley 19:53

That's interesting. So when you say... Is it a part of the process of running the club that you encourage people to put on their own events, or is it just a natural thing of that if there's comedy going on, other people will therefore want to do comedy?

Mark Tughan 20:10

It just happens that, you know, we live in a free country. Some of it is business related. Some people will go, Ooh, the Glee, they're obviously doing really well, I'll have a crack at it too. Some people do because they want to make money. Other people just do it, for the love of it, they would have done it regardless of whether or not there is a Glee. Also, it just so happens that we've also ridden the wave of the overall flowering and flourishing of stand up comedy anyway. It's been a phenomenal sort of, I mean, I wouldn't quite say 40 years but certainly more than 30 because I date modern comedy back to the very late 70s, you know, the 1979, when the Comedy Store first got going in London, that was really the genesis of what we're looking at now. But it is true, I mean, the Glee was the first purpose built outside London. So, you know, we claim that prize!

Richard Minkley 21:14

Yeah, no, take it!

Mark Tughan 21:16

Most certainly. But yeah, I mean, there was already- The Nottingham Comedy Festival predates the Glee. Yeah. And it wasn't a big or decisive factor for us, enabling us to choose Nottingham. I would say Nottingham was chosen far more on emotional grounds by me, but also remember the opportunism, you know, a venue, four or five venues immediately became available. Which ones was I going to-? Which ones was I going to go for?

Richard Minkley 21:48

That's, yeah, it's always a confluence of events. It's never that there's one thing. Are there any other... Using Nottingham as an example, are there any other... Sort of clues that you look for when you're considering where a good place is, or is that industry secrets that...?

Mark Tughan 22:08

It's not so much industry secrets, but I mean, I'm in the business of, sort of, you know, I consider myself part of the hospitality industry. And I consider myself part of what, without wishing to dis

comedy, but I consider myself part of the big night out marketplace. So for me, it's big cities. If I wasn't, I mean, obviously, if I wasn't doing big cities, I'd probably be what I call a weekend warrior. I'd probably be putting on a little comedy night in, you know, I find a pub function room somewhere, and funnily enough, that's what I was going to do before I set up Birmingham.

Richard Minkley 22:44

Really?

Mark Tughan 22:45

What actually happened in the history of Birmingham was, I was going to keep my day job as a city banker in London. But I'd thought about setting up a comedy night, and I decided it wasn't going to be London, I wanted to be the first to do it outside London, and I chose Birmingham. And I found a pub, and I was going to do upstairs, above a pub, completely on a relatively informal basis, and you know, I reckoned if I could cover my costs, that would be just an absolutely, incredibly fun thing to do. It turns out in Birmingham, somebody was already doing it in 1993, 1994, but I was going to do it as well. And then the story goes, that I was in a Jongleurs with a crowd of people, and one of the people that I was with was a property surveyor. And in a drunken state, late one night in Jongleurs, Camden, I sort of half-jokingly said, "You know, I'm thinking of doing this in a pub function room, in Birmingham. I think I've got the place I want, but do you know of anywhere else that's sort of a bit like this, you know?" Because my mind was open to doing a Jongleurs, so to speak. "Do you know of a big place like this, with not very many pillars, upstairs, cheap rent, in the right part of town," you know, I wouldn't want to do it in the in the wrong part of town, and I forgot all about that conversation but the guy, only he was a property agents surveyor from Birmingham. He rang me at work a few days later, and said, "Look, you know, are you serious?" I went, "Yes, I think so." And he goes, "because if you are, I've got the place that's just for you." And the story is, I took a sickie at work, got on a train and went and saw this place, which is where we are in Birmingham now. And then I liked it so much, and I was going through a phase where I particularly hated my job, which was in the world of corporate finance, and I spoke to my uni mate, who was going to be my weekend warrior partner, who I also knew wasn't all that happy with his job as an accountant, and I sort of said, "Look, do you want to give up our day jobs and do this for real?" And he said, "No!", ran a mile, and I said, "Okay...", and I went ahead and did it on my own, basically. And that is really how the Glee started. Obviously, the catalyst was me being particularly unhappy with my job in as a city banker. Also remember, 1992 to 1993 was a horrible, horrible recession. So it wasn't that difficult for me to quit my job, because my job was pretty bloody awful, and I just about survive redundancy once, and I wasn't really happy with the new place that I ended up.

Richard Minkley 25:57

I was going to ask whether or not you regret... Well, not whether you regret it or not, but like, do you feel it was a good decision for you to make? But I have a feeling I know what the answer, like dropping out of finance and getting into comedy.

Mark Tughan 26:10

Yeah, no, there's no way that you can regret that. There obviously is the occasional moment where I do sort of wonder, I wonder if I stayed in corporate finance, where would I be, what sort of life would that have been? But I mean, I remember I did get out because I looked at some of my bosses and said, You know what, I don't want to be like them. Just don't want to be, you know, there's something unattractive about that, but no, don't get me wrong as well, when I quit my job and I set up the Glee, I also didn't think that I would be doing it for 30 years. Now I'm 26 years in, I thought I was gonna do it

for five years, do one club and either quit because it didn't work, or sell, or just, you know, move on. I didn't expect to have as much fun and as much enjoyable and obviously make a reasonable commercial success of it in the way that I did. But yeah, it wasn't difficult for me to walk into work one day and go, I quit.

Richard Minkley 27:19

I'm done with this! Yeah. Right. Okay. So let's, let's kind of focus in a little bit. One of the things I'm interested in is... Essentially, something that comes up a lot is, there's kind of like the opening night of the Glee Club seems like quite an important moment for comedy in Nottingham. So, do you... To begin with, do you remember setting up that opening night and trying to find... Because I'm trying to dig back into where Missimp fit into the opening night? Do you remember figuring out how they fit into that bigger evening?

Mark Tughan 27:56

I mean, they, I don't think they were... I'm not actually sure recall them being part of the official opening night.

Richard Minkley 28:04

It was the soft opening that they were a part.

Mark Tughan 28:06

Ah, yeah, yeah! I think they were involved in the soft opening. Yeah, yeah. And there after they had their own thing going. Was it weekly or monthly on a Friday night?

Richard Minkley 28:19

I think it would have been monthly.

Mark Tughan 28:21

Yeah, yeah. It would have been, there's no way it would have been weekly. So yeah, I mean, obviously, look, my focus was on the big night with the big pro acts and all that kind of stuff. So if I'm really honest, I struggle to recall the soft opening. Or even though I was actually quite intimate with the soft opening, because I found most of the acts to do it. I can't even remember how I did it, did I do it somehow on social media? I don't remember.

Richard Minkley 28:53

I was gonna say, were they local acts, or were they like, different people brought in or...?

Mark Tughan 28:58

I think there was an element of both local and national. But if I'm honest, when you do the opening of a big club, where you've just spent, in my case, nearly a seven figure sum. And you've spent all summer and, you know, you've dealt with a sort of, you know, seven o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night, all the things that are going wrong in the lead up to the opening of a club. It all becomes a massive, massive blur.

Richard Minkley 29:26

Wow.

Mark Tughan 29:28

I do remember the toilets flooding on Saturday night, on the big Saturday night. It was grim. I remember Andy Parsons was the big headliner. And he's also one of my favorite acts. I mean, I do remember it being a good, you know, triumphant opening, subject to, you know, water flooding out of the gents toilets from some sort of blocked drain somewhere. Well, I thought it was a good opening. I chalked it up as a win!

Richard Minkley 30:04

Okay, yeah! You stuck around, so it couldn't have been too bad! That's interesting because it also brings in another question. We were just talking a little bit about the idea of a local act, and a national standup act and an improv act. I'm interested more broadly in this as an issue all over the country, but with Missimp as an example, how do you think in terms of getting an improv act and fitting them in with a lot of stand up acts, because I'm not laboring under the assumption that people understand improv as much as they understand stand up, like stand up is very clearly... It's understood, it's much more commercially successful, people know what it is, even if it's not that well. They kind of get the idea of people telling jokes and stories and stuff. Improv is definitely not that. So how would you have... Like... Is it an easy thing to put an improv act in the opening night of your... Effectively a stand up gig?

Mark Tughan 31:14

It's not an easy thing. And the problem to some extent is that straight stand up is a victim of its own success, in the sense that I think people have got a very set idea as to what that is and what that involves. And of course, it's incredibly easy to understand because it typically involves one person, I mean, there's not even many double acts on the circuit anymore. But it basically involves one person walking onto a stage, picking up a microphone, trying to get a big laugh, preferably within the first 30 seconds or minute, and bingo, and it's, you know, certainly by the time we set up Nottingham, Live at the Apollo was a big thing. So stand up in that particular format is a victim of its own success. One of the really difficult issues that you have is as soon as you depart from the public's expectation of stand up, you immediately start to arouse almost suspicion.

Richard Minkley 32:14

Well, yeah.

Mark Tughan 32:14

So, I think it takes a bit of guts to depart from that. You even get it occasionally, with the very occasional double act that you put on, because you immediately get the public going, Whoa, what's this? I just expect, and it's obviously hugely male orientated as well. You expect to have 80% of the people to take the stage to be pale, male, and stale!

Richard Minkley 32:42

And it would have been much more the case in 2010 when the Glee was opening, if not earlier then, that's interesting. So in that case, again with Missimp as an example, what is the thing you're thinking when you're like, "I like this improv team. I'm going to put them in this show." You were saying, obviously, you were dealing with toilets but like, how do you give yourself permission to put that improv act in your thing? Is it just "Well, I'll roll the dice, see what happens?" Or is there more strategy involved?

Mark Tughan 33:18

It was a bit of a roll of dice, but it was also a bit of a sort of, look, I want to involve what I understood to be an institution in Nottingham, in the opening of the Glee Club, I mean, there's no doubt about it. I

mean, I got involved with them, because I saw them and I liked them. But I was also aware that they were very long standing in Nottingham and had a following. Still have a following.

Richard Minkley 33:50

Well, that's interesting, you use the phrase "institution". If you don't mind, what do you mean by- When you described Missimp, as in 2010, it was "an institution", what do you mean by that?

Mark Tughan 34:06

Well, I thought they were unique in the sense that, you know, in every other city that I've certainly been involved in, with the exception of London, and I don't have a club in London, but I've never come across another city, where one of the things that... When you look at the listings, magazines, and you hit the streets, and you look at flyers and posters and stuff like that, Nottingham was probably the only one where I saw an established and well liked improv group. I mean, I've not found that anywhere else where I've been. I didn't find that in Cardiff. And I actually didn't find it in, I mean Glasgow is a big city as well. I'm sure somewhere if I looked hard enough, I could find some improv happening somewhere. But I think what struck me is how easy it was to find it. I can't say I did any in-depth research, but by the way you can just tell. I mean, I knew these guys had been around for a long time. So when I say institution, what I mean is "established"? "Established". And that's rare because it's hard to carry that off. London's the only other place where you would just expect there to be, because it's one of the biggest, most important capital cities in the world. You just don't expect to see that in Nottingham. Not at all.

Richard Minkley 35:27

Yeah, well, this is one of the reasons why I want to do a history of it, to try and understand that. That's fascinating. Um, I'm just going to double check my notes. I've got plenty more questions, but I'm just making sure I don't get ahead of myself.

Mark Tughan 35:40

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 35:43

That's interesting. So, there's different parts of... Okay, so I've got about three or four different questions. One of the ones I'm going to ask now, just to make sure, we're about 35 minutes into this interview. Normally, I would do two 45 minute interviews with a break in between But I don't know how busy you are or how many fires you're fighting. How much time have you got to give me?

Mark Tughan 36:10

I'm probably gonna have to do another 10 minutes or so, and then I probably need to have a break, and maybe we could get back together later in the week. Would that be okay?

Richard Minkley 36:19

If you're happy to give me the time, absolutely.

Mark Tughan 36:22

Yeah yeah yeah, I'm sure I can, I'll probably be at home, because part of the reason I'm in the office is because we might be moving out of this office any day now.

Richard Minkley 36:29

Fair enough. In that case, I will try to bring this chapter that we're in to a point. Yeah. So we've talked a little bit about... There's a section I want to talk about, about the decline in the relationship between Missimp and The Glee Club, which is obviously a bit specific. There's no particular ill will or anything like that, so don't, I'm not gonna throw you under the bus, but...

Mark Tughan 36:40

Yeah, yeah.

Richard Minkley 37:00

I'll leave that for a different interview. But the thing I'm interested, we've talked about improv, bringing a club into Nottingham, and we've talked about fitting improv into a stand up gig and things like that. One of the things I'm very interested in is the idea of community and comedy. Because Missimp has very much formed an identity as a community. And-

Mark Tughan 37:23

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 37:24

Comedy clubs are not that, they may have community, they may nurture community, but they are businesses, and that's important to bear in mind, obviously. What is it like, with Missimp again as an example, trying to fit the opportunities and challenges of a comedy club with the local community? I appreciate that was a bit of a broad question, but...

Mark Tughan 37:53

Give me that again.

Richard Minkley 37:55

Yeah, to be honest, I'm not surprised. That was a terribly worded question. Yeah, so in dealing with a local community, what is the challenges in engaging with that community? Because you might go into that situation, and they could be feeling incredibly threatened that this big club that has a national reputation is going to come and squash the local scene. Or you might be bombarded with people who think they have now, you know, you're there to give only them the opportunities. How do you deal with the expectations around a local community?

Mark Tughan 38:30

I mean, I think you just have to be sort of honest and open with people and say, Look, we're not here to squash anyone, we're here to add to the sum total, it's not a zero sum game, it may well be that our presence even encourages even more of an ecosystem, so to speak, and, just be respectful of the people that you come to, some of them are obviously competitors. That's different, Missimp's absolutely not in that category at all. I mean, if anything, I didn't get the impression they bit my arm off, but I thought they were actually... I thought when I approached them and said, Will you come to the Glee? They were really, they were, well, flattered isn't the right word but I think they were just that, you know one of the so called big boys came along and liked what they did and thought that one of the big commercial clubs could potentially be a home for them. And I suppose what I was offering them was I was offering them a good space with all the light and sound, and they just walk in and do it. I did get the impression I think maybe they've suffered a little bit in their previous home and it wasn't maybe as secure as they wanted it. I just, you know, I just tried to be respectful of the wider scene and reassuring that I wasn't there to squash anybody. Except my direct competitors

Richard Minkley 40:11

I didn't want to destroy anybody but my enemies! I'm sorry, I need to say that's a joke, because when you write that down, it'll look like a sincere comment. But there's two things I want to dive into there. One is, you've said multiple times, they didn't bite my arm off for an opportunity to perform at the Glee club.

Mark Tughan 40:29

-my arm off, but they went, Yeah, we'd love to.

Richard Minkley 40:34

Did that surprise you, that there was this big opportunity, and you saw them- Like, again, you described them as a kind of in a basement when you saw them or maybe an attic, but it wasn't like-

Mark Tughan 40:47

I seemed to [remember parts]

Richard Minkley 40:49

Did it surprise you when they weren't a bit more kind of non- If they were a bit more nonchalant about performing at-?

Mark Tughan 40:55

No, because again, they were- I wasn't to know whether they were- They might have turned around to me and gone, No, we're really happy where we are. And in that case, I wouldn't have been remotely offended or upset. All I was doing was saying, Look, I've got this great new space. It's rare for us because not all our clubs have got multiple performance rooms. I just said, Look, you know, we've got a room that might work for you guys really well. But if they'd sort of said to us, You know what, we like our, you know, we like our basement and the atmosphere that creates, and the fact that it's a bit more rough and ready. And, you know, obviously, I've always been concerned that people see us as a chain. And I can't stop that. Because we are one now. We do have five venues now. And so, from that moment on, I always knew that we would be that. But I've always felt quite strongly that just because you've got three or four and that it therefore might be appropriate to call you a chain, it doesn't mean you have to act like a chain. You can still be as unchain-like as is humanly possible. I mean, thankfully, I never expected them to bite my arm off. And if they'd said, Look, Thanks, but no thanks. I'd have been fine with that, too.

Richard Minkley 42:20

Yeah. So-

Mark Tughan 42:22

If they said, And by the way, here's a bunch of flyers. Can you promote us? I would have said, Yes, course.

Richard Minkley 42:28

Yeah. That's interesting. So before I have the like, final questions that I would normally use, I just want to add one little thing is that that opportunity, it comes with a certain status, there's a difference between playing in a place, it was called the Art Org, which was like an empty building that had been repurposed for a variety of arts projects, performing in a venue like that is one thing, but performing in

a purpose built comedy club on the opening night brings with it a status, if not an opportunity to think of yourself as something different than a bunch of people coming to the comedy club as in like a club community project. Do you think, when you offer these spots to community performers, do you see that that change in status has an effect on them? Or is it something you have to be careful with?

Mark Tughan 43:26

I do, I do now. But I think if I'm guilty of anything, it's not- This has actually sort of come up a few times recently, I'm a little bit guilty of not realizing that we have as big a status as we do. Sometimes I have to be reminded by my own people, for example, and this is, you know, I mentioned to you this little crisis that I've got at the moment. I've had to be reminded on a few times recently by my own people, that, you know, Mark, just remember the fact that you are the big booker of circuit talent in the country, and you're getting bigger. And I'm guilty of not appreciating that. So if I'm guilty of something, I'm guilty of inviting Missimp to get involved in the opening night of the Glee Club, and maybe not fully appreciating what a big deal that is for the likes of Missimp. But that's partly because I don't really sort of get our own and my own status in the industry. You know, it's like, for example, without wishing to sort of go too much into the crisis, we've been talking about setting up ways that people can report concerns, for example, through the structures of the Glee, whether or not it's bullying in the workplace, or issues to do with comics in the club, and stuff like that. And I've always sort of said, Look, you know, I consider myself a pretty approachable sort of normal regular guy. And my own guys actually, quite rightly sort of say to me, Well, that's all well and good and that's a great thing to think. But you have to get it into your head that you intimidate people, you know, people are going to run like, you can't just turn around all the 140 staff and go, Oh, yeah, you got any problems, just email me. You know, you can't expect people just to come to the boss of an organization like the Glee because people will be intimidated. And it's the same with the acts as well. I don't fully appreciate how much people may sometimes be a little bit frightened to just drop me a line, whereas I think it's the most normal thing in the world. And if somebody just drops me a line and as if I'm just an ordinary guy, that's the way I take it, but I need reminding frequently that that's not the case and that people take picking up the phone to me or emailing me. Some of them don't. Some of them will email me with whatever's on their mind, but the vast majority of people won't. They are intimidated by our status. I'm a little bit guilty of inviting them to do that without at all appreciating that that might have been a bit of a game changer for them.

Richard Minkley 46:10

It's fascinating, because Missimp itself is having the exact same anxieties around, do we need to put things in place for people to make sure there's no issues. So it's interesting to hear that it's exactly the same on the other side of the spectrum.

Mark Tughan 46:23

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 46:24

I am pushing- I'm going to be cheeky and fit one more question in. It's the last one to kind of round us up.

Mark Tughan 46:30

Go for it.

Richard Minkley 46:32

Yeah, so why did you- The question I've been asking people is, you know, why did you keep coming back to Missimp for you, why did you decide to stick it out with comedy and not go back to-? In fact, yeah, particularly in Nottingham, why did you decide to really stick with Nottingham and work through the difficulty of setting up the club and work through it and keeping that club here? Why did you stick to it?

Mark Tughan 46:58

Stubbornness, to be honest, refusal to accept defeat. I mean, the thing is, sometimes people talk about the entrepreneur gene. I think there is such a thing as a little bit of the entrepreneur gene, there's a little bit of a gene that sort of says, the worst thing that you can say to somebody like me is, you can't do this, it won't work. It'll fail. Because that just switches a switch in my head that basically makes me even worse. Refusal to- I just refuse to accept defeat. Sometimes even if that comes at a bit of an irrational cost. But yeah, I mean, I've got friends in business, for example, that told me I should have abandoned Nottingham within a year or two of it opening, because it really wasn't a success at all. I just, I struggle to do that. I'm very proud of the fact that I've never closed a club!

Richard Minkley 47:58

Wow.

Mark Tughan 48:01

I just don't like going backwards.

Richard Minkley 48:02

Already there's so much I want to ask you about that, but we'll have to save that and see if we can set up another interview.

Mark Tughan 48:08

Yeah, sorry about that.

Richard Minkley 48:09

No, no, no, it's okay. Mark, thank you so much for your time. I'm going to stop recording here.

7.2. Interview 2 of 2

a) Part 1 of 1

6th July 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

nottingham, comedy, glee club, people, bit, big, suppose, Bradley, improv, clubs, glee, thought, Birmingham, happening, London, cycle, comedy clubs, capacity, city, community

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Mark Tughan

Richard Minkley 00:00

There we go. Okay, I'll hit record. Fantastic. We are back. It is 11:47 on the sixth of July 2020. Richard Minkley interviewing Mark Tughan for the Missimp Oral History Project. Fantastic. Okay, so to go straight into it then, where we left off speaking last time, we kind of talked about the opening of the Glee Club in Nottingham, and we just began to talk about how great that was going. However, the next part of Missimp's story with The Glee Club is a decline that results with them no longer performing with The Glee Club. One of the things, I don't know how involved you would have been in that process. Is it something you would have been engaged with or is it someone else dealing with acts?

Mark Tughan 00:54

Well, no, I did obviously make the ultimate decision. And part of that was because, well, you know, I mean, although these sorts of calls are mainly made, then leveled by the in situ manager. In this case, you know, because it was my baby, you see what I mean? You know, Bradley came along to me and said, Look, you know, I want to knock this on the head. I don't think it's working for me or the venue anymore, but you know, because you brought it in, I wouldn't dream of just, you know, knocking something out that you had gone to some effort to put in. And the truth is, it was several years later. Yeah, I mean, I was disappointed that it came to me like that. But Bradley sort of said, Look, this is a phenomenon that we get at the Glee, you know, when there's another show on at the same time as say Missimp, then the really nightmarish thing is, you know what some people are like, they're so dumb, that they go on to the website and they simply buy the cheapest ticket. So there was a particular issue that Bradley was reporting to me, and that is that he was getting people that have bought ticket for Missimp that had really just, they just quickly popped onto the website, you know, bought the cheapest looking ticket and thought that they were getting, you know, live at the Apollo style stand up. And then they were, they were coming out of it and saying, where's the manager? Where's the management? I didn't want this! Because, you know, obviously, as you know, improv is something very, very different. It's got a following. It's a very specialist following. And there's nothing worse something for all parties, both for Missimp and for us, really, that, you know, they were getting people in their audiences that after 10 minutes or so, we're kind of going, well isn't really what I was expecting there, you know, in that case, it was the customers fault. You know, we obviously go to

great efforts to sort of say, Well, this is what this show involves, and this is what that show involves, but to make people hopefully feel a bit better, this happens with us all the time in Birmingham, where we really quite frequently have a solo show happening in our small studio on a Saturday night, on a Friday night. And indeed, sometimes on a Saturday night. And, you know, the regular four act Live at the Apollo style show in the big room and people are constantly buying a ticket for the, they just buy the slightly cheaper ticket. It puts us in a difficult position because now what we try and do, we only put a more expensive ticket on in the studio-

Richard Minkley 03:52

Which, I suppose, makes it harder to sell the smaller act.

Mark Tughan 03:57

Yeah, yeah. So that was a particular issue, which Bradley sort of said, Look, it's really causing me quite a lot of grief on a regular basis. But I think the truth is as well, it wasn't pulling in the numbers. And it was making a, you know, quite a big room just sort of... Sometimes the problem is, it's not a failure, but it feels like a failure, and it starts to sort of... It starts to project itself as not that successful, if you've got, you know, a room with only 20 people in it. So, you know, tough, but it was a tough decision, but it had to, I think it probably had to happen. I think people sort of have this expectation that, you know, things that go on in the Glee, you know, they do attract, you know, 50 or 100 or 200 people, but when it was regularly attracting, you know, 25 or 30. We've got a lot of overheads to it, Bradley was saying it's not paying its way either.

Richard Minkley 05:05

That's interesting. So, on the topic of overheads, that's something I'm going to return to. But just a key detail to check, this person Bradley keeps coming up. Are you happy to give me Bradley's surname?

Mark Tughan 05:19

Bradley Seagrave, yeah. Seagrave.

Richard Minkley 05:23

How do you spell Seagrave? I feel like this is-

Mark Tughan 05:25

S-E-A.

Richard Minkley 05:26

S-E-A.

Mark Tughan 05:27

G-R-A-V-E.

Richard Minkley 05:29

Okay, fantastic. Okay, just to make sure I've got, we don't accredit the wrong Bradley or anything like that. Just make sure, but... Was it... You described it as being presented to you by Bradley as this sort of conundrum, almost, were you aware that things were not going so well for Missimp at that point, because-

Mark Tughan 05:51

Yeah, the truth is, I'd seen the numbers, and they weren't looking good, but, you know, I just, I tend to be a bit lethargic on these things and go, Oh, well, you know, next month will be better, next month will be better. And then, it's one of the things that I'm probably not the best at. I'm not. I'm not tough enough in knocking things on the head. And I suppose one of the things that has made us reasonably successful or probably one of the only organizations that has made a decent success out, you know, commercial success out of being a comedy club is the fact that I think you do have to be quite... Ruthless isn't quite the word, you know, just strict. You know, if it doesn't pay the bills, you can't keep doing it indefinitely. But like any entrepreneur, you know, I'm happy to- You know, the nature of being an entrepreneur is that you assume the risk of losses for a period of time. So that's what we did. But, when I looked at the numbers, I realized that it wasn't commercial. So it was sadly a commercial decision and not a lot else really.

Richard Minkley 07:13

It's interesting because I feel like there's a lot of people who would hear what you're saying from Missimp side of things, and completely agree with you. Are there... I'm trying to understand that in a broader context, you've said you have to make these decisions. The specific thing I'm interested in this is that it's a kind of community organization, rather than, for example, if it was an act that was supposed to be doing a regular show, and it was just that was their business they put on comedy shows. Missimp has this extra community thing that was kind of forming a little bit at the time. Have you experienced that kind of taking an opportunity on someone and it working for a bit and not, with any other kind of like, it's a difficult question, but have you had that experience with another community group or community project? Or is this something quite particular for what happened with Missimp?

Mark Tughan 08:08

No, I can't honestly say I've had that experience, because we've not really had other sort of community type things that have taken place. I've had other situations where I've sort of, you know, I've taken a risk on a particular act doing a particular thing. And obviously, you know, giving it a bit of a shot and generally speaking, what happens is, we both have a bit of a chat about it and go, yeah, there's, it's not really worked. And, you know, they are only too happy obviously, to sort of say, well, you know, because they want to move on, but they can't spend their life in a no income situation. But yeah, this, even after doing it for 26 years, this is probably the only one were, you know, there was that community element? And I was probably, if I'm really honest, I was probably a bit naive about it.

Richard Minkley 09:08

Hmm. Yeah, that's very interesting. So, okay, seeing as we're talking about this- Sorry, I'm looking at my questions and rejigging them a little bit in my head, because that raises a question of other kinds of comedy... I don't want to necessarily say art forms, but like structures of running a comedy night or community or like, because you obviously are doing a comedy club with lots of stand up. It also works with music gigs, and that's kind of the predominant way that comedy exists. And Missimp is something very different to that. Now, I only really know what's happening in Nottingham and Missimp. But do you see like interactions between... I don't want to just say community, but the way Missimp works is that there's a lot of drop-ins where people can come and get involved. And they also run, they were beginning to run courses around that era. Have you seen across the country or the particular venues that you've been, that kind of situation where comedy is something you can participate in exists? I'm kind of using your eyes for a bit of an eagle eye view, but do you see that existing in other areas? Or is it something again, particular to Nottingham and Missimp?

Mark Tughan 10:31

I think it's pretty particular to Nottingham and Missimp. You know, maybe it's because we're known to being, you know, I mean, we are a limited company. We're not a not-for-profit, you know, everyone that works for me doesn't, for example, have another job, I don't have another job. So, everyone sort of gets the fact that if it's not commercial, it can't happen. And no, so I've not really come across that situation, much before. I mean, if you maybe contacted, other not-for-profit organizations maybe, for example, in Birmingham, the one I would think about would be the Mac, and where it's maybe sort of partly city council funded, or, you know, other arts organizations that maybe get funding from the Arts Council that are probably much more familiar with community based or community based projects that are never probably going to be commercial from the outset. And I suppose it's just because, you know, our whole history, our whole culture was that we're gonna make a business out of this. So, I just suppose it's the discipline of it, you know, it tends to never get off the ground in the first place. In that respect, like, I mean, maybe the closest thing I ever had to it was, we started doing podcasts in the Birmingham club, but it was- We were doing podcasts like, you know, 10 years ago, literally 10, 11 years ago when nobody knew what a bloody podcast was. And it was great fun. And everyone did it for no money if you catch my drift, you know, we didn't do it for any money. We got a presenter, he didn't do it for any money. You know, we tried to sort of, get it out there without having to pay any fees and costs and stuff like that. That's probably the closest I've ever come to it. And the bizarre thing was, we quit doing those podcasts because they were called "Glee Casts". And it was at the same time as the 20th Century Fox Glee TV show. So as soon as we put them out, everyone confused them with the Glee TV show. After about three or four, then we just thought clearly these aren't what- We knocked those on their head as well, that's the closest I've ever come to another sort of project, but you know, even in the back of my mind as a businessman, I did sort of have it in the back of my mind that this is the start of something, I'm prepared to do it for nothing. But like any businessman, I'm thinking, I'm obviously sort of thinking I might be planting an acorn that will grow into something later on.

Richard Minkley 13:17

Yeah. And this is one of the things I'm very interested in, because I feel like if you look at it on paper, in fact, you could argue if you look at it on paper the same way that you did, Missimp shouldn't really survive for as long as it has. It's been going over 20 years now. One of the things I'm very interested in is survivability. And obviously for comedy, I mean, it's well known, and you've talked about it in other interviews as well as the last one, like, the expansion of the Glee Club came as Jongleurs imploded. And there was lots of finding spaces that they had to leave, that you then set up in. So from your perspective, how volatile is the... I was gonna say comedy scene, I don't know whether that means the culture or the art or whatever, or just the industry, how volatile is comedy for a business person such as yourself?

Mark Tughan 14:20

Um... I wouldn't say... It's not sort of volatile on a daily, weekly, monthly basis. It has... It's had a couple of sort of cycles, if you catch my drift, but you know, these cycles have been sort of two or three over, you know, in my experience 26 years. And, you know, even over and above that, there's what I would call the sort of super cycle, which was obviously back in sort of 1979-1980 when the rule book was rewritten and the Comedy Store started. And the super cycle has been constantly getting better and better. It's just I suppose within that, there's been the general business cycle. So I suppose you could say, you know, I've been through two or three recessions, since I set up the Glee Club in 1994. I set it up in a recession, the early 2000s was a bit of a recession. And we had 2008-2011, that was a recession.

Richard Minkley 15:25

That was a hell of a recession!

Mark Tughan 15:28

-present day recession, so there have been cycles, and there's been good years and bad years, there's also been one particular phase that we really struggled, and I still believe very strongly that we struggled because of the Fox TV thing that was going on as well. And I mean, thankfully, you know, up until the beginning of the pandemic, we were actually doing very well in the current cycle, but all bets are off now.

Richard Minkley 16:00

Yes, very much so. It's interesting for the just for the sake of the record this morning, they announced they're putting 1.5 billion worth of grants into the art sector, which I suppose is a certain context for our conversation. You mentioned two things there, a cycle and a super cycle; what is-? How would you describe that cycle that you described there? We'll talk about the super cycle in a sec. But what is that cycle that you were talking about?

Mark Tughan 16:27

The cycle is sort of, I suppose is mainly the economic cycle. You know, we had a bit of a downturn, as did the rest of the economy, in sort of 2000 to about 2002, I think. We had a bit of a downturn between 2008 and 2011, in terms of the wider economy, although actually that was quite exceptional for us, because for one reason or another, I think we did really quite well during that particular recession. Obviously, this is, one we're in the moment is a purely induced recession, which obviously in our case is pretty extreme because we're closed, so I was mainly referring to the wider economic cycle. But even within that, I think, our sort of product, I think does quite well, because when, in times of people cutting back, I think, if you're what I describe as an "affordable treat", and then we tend to sort of get cut a little bit less than the slightly less than affordable treats like, you know, cars and expensive holidays, which I think is the only real explanation as to why we actually did quite well, in 2009-2010, when in theory, the world was practically coming to an end.

Richard Minkley 17:50

So these cycles, the smaller cycles you're talking about are generally like... They're kind of following the trends of the broader economy. It's the kind of bigger context. There's not, it's not a cycle of what happens purely in the comedy... I don't want to say scene- industry where things grow, and...

Mark Tughan 18:10

Yeah, I mean, it's been hard to detect whether there's been a particular particular sort of series of cycles in the comedy world bar the what I would call "the super cycle", which is just, you know, obviously Comedy Store, alternative comedy, the the first wave of really big names, you know, the Lee Evans's, the Peter Kay's and then the whole touring thing that sort of kicked off, which I think we've managed to exploit for want of a better word, quite successfully That's been the super cycle

Richard Minkley 18:47

That's very interesting, I suppose to tie it back into the project a little bit, in those cycles or super cycles, have you ever noticed improv as a version of comedy either- Not necessarily breaking through because don't feel it's necessarily right to say it's really broken through, but was there any point in that

where you've noticed improv sort of grow or become wider spread, or has it always been fairly under the radar?

Mark Tughan 19:17

No. Sadly, I think that's really part of the problem. I think it's terrible shame that improv hasn't benefited as part of the wider, I suppose, comedy super cycle, you'd have thought that a rising tide lifts all boats, you see what I mean? And I think it's a terrible shame that improv hasn't quite risen in the same way. I wish I could sort of... I wish I could sort of try and further analyze why that is, I mean, maybe it's been a victim you could say of, maybe there's sort of slight homogenization of the rest of comedy. And, you know, maybe the stuff on TV, it's driven a, it's helped to sort of drive and create a particular sort of image and style of comedy, ie, a little bit pale, male and stale, you know, solo bloke with a microphone. And it hasn't met, you know, maybe improv just hasn't quite caught the imagination. I do think that it was a shame when, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* maybe came off TV, because I think what's driven the wider sort of super cycle for want of a better word again, in businesses like mine, is that you know, *Live at the Apollo* helps us, because I think audiences at home can see that format and go well, I'd quite like to experience something similar to that live. And deep deep down as well, they know that when they watch *Live at the Apollo* I think they know they're getting sort of a sanitized eight minutes, that's very TV ready. Whereas when they come up to us they know they're coming and looking for especially for the less sanitized version.

Richard Minkley 21:22

I see. That's interesting because you're describing like how things... How different things help you promote what you put on in your clubs. And it made me think a lot of what's happening- Well, the version of this in the states where there are in particular cities like Chicago, much more established comedy improv settings, where there's people like, you know, Stephen Colbert and Amy Poehler, those kinds of people who have gone through improv and then gone on to TV. Do you ever look across the ocean and think, would that work for what I'm doing? Or would that, and this isn't me pitching it to you, but I'm interested in whether you've ever looked at the kind of system or the process that's happening over there and compared it to what's happening with your clubs in your country, I suppose.

Mark Tughan 22:17

No, if I'm really honest, I've not analyzed it, you know, from the point of view of across the pond in much depth, I suppose. You know, in my sort of terribly simplistic mind, I just thought that, if you look at the Comedy Store players, that's probably the very personification and image of improv here in the UK. I thought it has actually been successful for quite a long period of time in London. And funnily enough, you know, part of the whole sort of thinking behind setting up the Glee in the first place, one of the big, sort of, business gambles, I suppose, that I took is that when I first was thinking about setting up the Glee, everyone sort of said to me, Well, this is just a London thing. Alternative comedy is just going to be a London sort of so called sophisticated thing that doesn't translate outside of the city. My big call was basically saying "nonsense." to that, a knob gag to a roomful of accountants at the Comedy Store. *Jongleurs* is a knob gag to a roomful of accountants and other professional people, whether that's in Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Nottingham or anything else. And I suppose I sort of looked at the Comedy Store players and went, well, maybe it's time to see whether or not that will also translate, and grow and establish and thrive outside of London. And it just hasn't.

Richard Minkley 23:50

I understand. I understand what you're saying. We need more knob gags, I get what you say- No, I'm joking. That's very interesting because it's something that's bubbled up in other interviews I've had, comparing, we could talk about this broadly because obviously, you've got clubs all over the shop, but the difference in the comedy scene in somewhere like London and somewhere like Nottingham, now, obviously, you've got a very particular thing where a lot of people can come from London to Nottingham and travel around, because that's what comics, you know, that's kind of the gig that they do, they go to the gigs. How would you describe the difference between that centralized, not even centralized, that big capital scene of comedy, and places further around like Nottingham?

Mark Tughan 24:39

I'm really sorry, can you give me that again, I sort of, I lost my concentration.

Richard Minkley 24:44

To be honest, this happens a lot. I will ask a rambley question that doesn't make any sense, and the other person's like, Oh, well, he asked it with such confidence, it must have made sense. Yeah. So what's the difference between comedy as a culture in London, and outside of London, for example, Nottingham.

Mark Tughan 25:05

Oh, God, I think that's really different. I think that's really difficult. No, I'm not sure there isn't... I'm not sure there is much difference in terms of sort of wider culture between London and the rest of the country. Not now. I think there would have been back in the late 70s and 80s in the same sense that, you know, where London leads, the rest of the country follows. And that sort of maybe, that's a rip off from you know, what happens in America, we often follow. I don't think there's a big sort of cultural difference, which is why I was maybe sort of, I think that helps to explain why I was more surprised that the improv thing didn't also follow and spread out from London. Like you say, Missimp is unique in the sense of it's been around in Nottingham, but it's maybe not unique in the sense that it's been around for all that hell of a long period of time, but it's never really pulled in audiences of hundreds, has it?

Richard Minkley 26:14

No. Or at least, if they did they didn't do it for very long. So, this kind of brings on to another question-

Mark Tughan 26:23

If I'm honest, I actually thought maybe sort of arrogantly, I thought I could be part of bringing, you know, helping Missimp to get from that sort of, you know, 30, 40, 50 people up to, you know, I think if it had regularly got 100 or 125 people on a really regular basis, I think that would be quite an achievement, but it wasn't to be.

Richard Minkley 26:47

Well, I think I might be able to, with other interviews I'm doing, hopefully be able to understand a bit what went wrong on Missimp's part, and it's very, it's honestly fascinating hearing your perspective on it. I think another thing I'd like to ask about is capacity. Because obviously London is, I mean, even in the natural curve of cities being bigger than other, there's like a logarithmic where it's always about half the size bigger than the city that came before it or something. London is enormous. And Nottingham is not.

Mark Tughan 27:21

Yes.

Richard Minkley 27:25

In the early days, 2010, you're setting up The Glee Club in Nottingham. What's the difference in capacity between London? Or, because obviously, you don't have a club in London, but what's the difference in capacity between somewhere like London and Nottingham?

Mark Tughan 27:42

When you say difference in capacity, what do you mean? I mean, so catchment is obviously minuscule compared to London, Nottingham is a city with a few hundred thousand people within easy access of the city center, whereas London's like millions. I mean, even Birmingham is a couple of million within sort of drive time of central Birmingham. So Nottingham is a fraction of that.

Richard Minkley 28:10

Hmm, I think one of the things I'm thinking of capacity is that even with Missimp, there has been several moments where we've got loads of stuff going on and we realized there's only so much improv you can put on in a city like Nottingham. Like, I really felt... I because I've been a part of Missimp and worked on things. You can really feel sometimes where we are stretching the, the capacity of the market to support us. Is that something you've experienced, setting up the Glee Club in Nottingham? A sense like, is there enough potential customers here to support this club?

Mark Tughan 28:46

Oh, yeah, for sure. I think Nottingham, out of all our clubs, Nottingham was the hardest to get going. Nottingham was the hardest to get going, and that's partly obviously size and, not so much demographics but definitely just the size of the city. And I mean, I'm not going to be putting Glee clubs into cities smaller than Nottingham. It's a big city thing. I think there will always be room above pub or function room comedy in almost every smaller city and larger town and even smaller towns. But there aren't that many cities that can support big commercial venues like a glee club that you know, obviously in order for us to survive, you know, we'd need to be doing comedy 2, 3, 4 nights a week in order to do that.

Richard Minkley 29:42

That's interesting. When you say that you wouldn't do anywhere smaller than Nottingham, is that because Nottingham... Because there's one way you could say, well, Nottingham is about just big enough to survive. But, is it also possibly because you set up Nottingham and because it was quite difficult to get going, is that why you would prefer not to do somewhere smaller than Nottingham?

Mark Tughan 29:45

Yeah, both, definitely both of those, it was a bit of a wake up call. And, you know, having said that, I mean, part of the reason why I did Nottingham is because I looked at that building, and thought, well, gosh, there used to be a Jongleurs in there. And I did have a little bit of visibility on what it used to do in the heyday. But when I talked about the heyday, there probably was a period of time where regions in some Jongleurs really did, for quite a limited and temporary period of time, they really were in the right place at the right time, and I think comedy has rolled back a little bit from that, it's not turned out to be as mainstream and it's not turned out to be an activity that people do every month or so like some people might go to the cinema for every, you know, on a really regular basis. So yeah, there's no doubt about it. It's been the most disappointing of all my venues. But that said, you know, if it was

loss making now i'd be gone. It did come around at the end, and it's a profitable venture for us, but it's least profitable of all our clubs.

Richard Minkley 31:24

But it's still standing. It's interesting. You described a moment of having a bit of a wake up call. If you're happy to talk about it, can you describe that wake up call a little bit, like, do you remember where you were or what particular- Was there a moment when you first realized?

Mark Tughan 31:41

Yeah, probably a few months after we opened, you know, we'd had a good few weeks. And then the penny drops that it hadn't been as great a launch as we hoped, like some of that was just because when I decided to do Nottingham, I genuinely thought, Gosh, I'm going to be open here and I'm going to be the only one. In actual fact I don't know if you sort of follow things closely at the ground but you know, Jongleurs reopened.

Richard Minkley 32:12

Yeah.

Mark Tughan 32:13

And the Jongleurs name did help back in those days, and good old Darrell at Just the Tonic. You know, I mean he used to be function room, but he managed to get hold of himself a great big basement nightclub. So we did end up in a sort of a fairly ridiculous situation, whereby there were actually three big clubs, all trying to pull in two, three, four hundred people on the Saturday night, and it's the simple, basic mathematics of that in a city not that big, like Nottingham. The idea that there's going to be three giant comedy clubs all trying to pull in three or four hundred people on a Saturday night. Basically all that happened was nobody made money. Then obviously Jongleurs closed. And then you know, probably us and Just the Tonic started to make a bit of money perhaps and you know, now Just the Tonic are obviously still very much around but they do a lot less than they used to. So a lot of it's just, you know, some, if not a lot of it, is just supply and demand. And you know, I've had that experience elsewhere, They used to be a cinema in the complex that I'm in in Birmingham, and another multiplex cinema opened up on Broad Street in Birmingham, and the cinema in my complex lasted another year, and then it closed. There is there is the basic economics of overcapacity, and supply and demand. So, there was a bit of that going on in Nottingham for probably longer than any of us expected.

Richard Minkley 33:53

So this is one of the things I'm interested because there's a parallel here between you're talking about things lasting for a long time. In it, there's several points in Missimp story they are, in fact, I've, I've, I've seen this with other communities like with local amateur dramatics and gigs and artists, often there will be. In fact, I'll tell you a story. They did a performance at a venue. I think it wasn't above a pub, but it was a very pub based thing called seven. And they performed there to about three people because I think Oasis was on at the arena. So no one was interested in comedy on that night. But they said, Oh, hey, you know, I hope you've enjoyed the show. If you want to come back, we'll be here next week, or next month even and the person who owned the bar said, Not if I have anything to say about it. So which is Yeah, the look of shock. I made that face as well. That pub doesn't exist anymore. Missimp still do. So, and it's interesting. you're describing your story of all of this competition in a city without that capacity. How do you think The Glee Club has survived all of this? Because I'm trying to understand why Missimp isn't dead. But at the same time, there's another question for you which is

why hasn't the gay club gone the way of all these other things where they either implode or turn into a discotheque or just become a function room?

Mark Tughan 35:21

I'm part of it is bloody minded stubbornness, not giving up refusing, refusing to accept defeat, but you know, obviously, in in practically all these situations, you know, that, you know, it's a, it's a it's, you know, that this business of business so to speak is a great big sort of Darwinian game of survival of the fittest, you know, we, we're big, we're efficient, we stick out it, you know, we're big enough business to be able to absorb losses for you know, not an unlimited period of time, but a period of time. And then you know, in the case of Nottingham for example, you know, things can Good for us because, you know, jongleurs did close and, and just the tonic didn't know that they didn't stop, but they did. They did significantly less, you know, allowing them you know, the cream to rise, you want for want of a better expression, the cream to rise to the top, but it is to that, then it's quite sort of simple and Darwinian really. Yeah, you have too many people trying to do the same thing. And nobody makes any money. And that, that lessons off of it. And people, people maybe break even or make a very small, very unsatisfactory profit. And then and then you get to the point when people have given up. And that of that allows us to make a decent, decent return on investment.

Richard Minkley 36:47

That's interesting from your, from your perspective, do you see that Darwinian process happening with act as well as the venues and the businesses?

Mark Tughan 36:56

To some to some extent, yes.

Richard Minkley 37:00

It's interesting, what do you mean to some extent?

Mark Tughan 37:02

Well, it's there has, it has been a tough time for brands, you know that there was a period of time when frankly, there were far too many comedy clubs all over the country. And you know, nothing. It was, I suppose, a relatively extreme example. But, you know, you've also had that I've also had that in Cardiff, for example, where there were two giant clubs, and so not as bad as three, for example, in Nottingham,

Richard Minkley 37:30

but they have been bigger than us as well, to

Mark Tughan 37:33

get an ecosystem, you know, you get, you get, you know, a handful of, you know, function room, you know, room above pub type operators, which is great. But in Cardiff, I noticed as well, we didn't just have a handful of function room operators, we have, you know, a dozen or 15. So, you know, even in Cardiff, you know, there weren't there were any sort of two giant clubs, but there were there were Probably, you know, well more than a dozen or so other, you know, function room type operators and that, that that contributes to an element of over capacity. I mean, when it went to seeing it went to seeing it played out, obviously in a very brutal fashion now and in the world of casual dining, I wish now now we've had the pandemic, but you know, the casual dining, you know, overcapacity issue my god is that is that being sorted out by by the pandemic and some of it is some of it is you know, what

you might call good some of the some of the shakeout isn't that bad because to be perfectly honest, there were a number of there was a bit of overcapacity in there were probably in a number of zombie companies, but it's never that good when you know, the you know, the good ones get get knocked out and an end up closing venues just as much as the the bad ones.

Richard Minkley 38:59

Yes.

Mark Tughan 39:00

To the extent that it's happening with apps as well, I mean, the simple answer is there were too many clubs nationwide. That encouraged see, you know, like any complex adaptive system, it encouraged a lot a large number of people to try and make a living out of stand up. And then of course, you know, the big the big catalyst was, you know, jongleurs going, I mean, nobody's ever really fully replaced Jongleurs. And but also, you know, a number of people who might have been, you know, trying to make a living a function room comedy have pulled out, not you know, now there's an equilibrium, but there's the human cost of getting to that equilibrium is that quite a lot of people tried to become stand-ups and not all of them have. Yeah, I've pulled it off.

Richard Minkley 39:52

That's, that's really interesting.

Mark Tughan 39:55

And that's tough for anyone that that goes that route. Whether or not A business like like mine, or an individual that wants to really wants to make a career in living up, stand up.

Richard Minkley 40:08

So do you feel that this capacity and this process of natural selection, you just refer to it as a kind of equilibrium? To kind of round off this idea? Do you think there's more capacity? And that that is part of the equilibrium that more people have come into, go into comedy as either a social or an entertainment thing? Or is it just that the capacity for people to come to clubs, for example, in Nottingham has stayed the same? And the number of venues have fallen away to meet that?

Mark Tughan 40:42

But a bit of both, really? Yeah, the number of venues have, I think, have fallen away to meet that. But I think there was a you know, there was a crazy time in the, in the northeast, yeah. Probably for most of that decade. When, you know, comedy really, really was the flavor. And I think it's now sort of settled down to you know it. To the extent that we've done many surveys, we've only done one or two. The impression that I get is that comedy is still it's a little bit of a tree just a little bit like going to the theater. Yeah. And you do it. Some people do it frequently. Yes, of course. We've got a few. We've got regulars. Yeah. We've got a few sort of super regulars. We've had one or two people that we've that we've ended up sort of seeing week after week after week. But, you know, maybe it's a slight disappointment. It's not it's not turned into the sort of thing that everyone does all the time. such that, you know, a city like Nottingham can support two or three big comedy clubs.

Richard Minkley 41:48

Well, you would say that because you want them all to give you money.

Mark Tughan 41:53

Okay, no, but if there's a bit of both that were there were there were too many clubs and But there was also a period where it looked like the appetite was fairly insatiable. This is this is a,

Richard Minkley 42:05

I've got about five minutes left with you. And there's just I've covered most of the questions I want to but the last question I kind of bonus one I want to cover very quickly is the idea of education. So things like not just education in Hey, this is what comedy is, but in terms of teaching people to perform teaching people kind of skills and courses or drop pins and things like that. Has that ever been something on the Glee Club's radar? as something Yeah, it could be done. Yeah.

Mark Tughan 42:36

Again, we, we try not to we not we try not to sort of spearhead everything, but when we, when the right person approaches us and says, you know, I'd like to, I'd like to sort of, you know, potentially partner with you and, and sort of, you know, spearhead an activity like that we will definitely engage with them. And we did we you know, we got together with it, you know, circus act in Birmingham that I've known for 20 years or, or so and he had been doing it in, in, in another, another sort of art center. And he was doing very well. And he, you know, sometimes I think people sort of think that adding the name, adds a adds a certain sort of sparkle to it. Yeah, it doesn't always happen like that. I think he came along thinking, well, I'll add the Glee name to the mix. And suddenly, instead of having, you know, 15 people along to my courses, I'll have 50 people along to my courses. And, you know, that's not how life works out all the time. So when we did, we did have a crack, but I can, I'm very happy to say that he, he's back where he was before. He had he had a go, we had to go not not everything that not everything that I or The Glee Club touches turns, turns to go, unfortunately. And, you know, I'm a great believer in sort of failing fast so to speak, you know, I'll try it, I'll try a lot of things. And I'm a great believer in if you try something, and, and it works, run with it, but if it doesn't work, and you know, this brings us maybe full circle all the way back to this ended, if it doesn't work or it doesn't work that well then, you know, try and, you know, come apart without without falling out and just, you know, just sort of say to everybody, we did have we did have a crack at it. It wasn't it wasn't to be. Let's all Let's all go, you know, go back to walk to what we what we all do best.

Richard Minkley 44:34

Yeah, that's a really interesting note to end on. Because the Missimp went through a lot of changes after it left The Glee Club. But that is another story. And I

Mark Tughan 44:45

mean, were they particularly disappointed. When, when we when we called it a day is that I think I felt I felt bad but I from time, it felt to me It felt needed to live to deliver the bad news because, you know, I'm the boss. And I have to step up, do that I don't expect my managers to know to know to make those tough calls.

Richard Minkley 45:12

Okay, well, from what I've spoken to people, generally, they understood that it wasn't working. And you were talking about how it's disappointing to stand on to see that your audiences shriveled in the numbers. It's also very difficult to be in a very big room as an act, when it's very empty. That is not a good feeling. There's also a lot of the the chemistry within the scene at that time. I don't know whether I'm gonna push it a little bit. But there is there was a sense that the people who were performing at the Glee Club, were beginning to they were becoming more and more hierarchical, like there was a special group that would do the Glee Club, but then there was a lot of people further down who would

come to the drop ins or the courses or the workshops that are there. Like, well, if I'm not getting in The Glee Club, what am I doing here? Or Well, all of those guys are a little bit too high up to touch and they feel a little bit weird. However, at the same time, there is some

Mark Tughan 46:13

that is something that I wasn't aware of at all. I hadn't really realized that one of the, I suppose the, the side effects of, of the Glee was to sort of them. Yeah, to start introducing a sort of a different strata. I hadn't realized that at all.

Richard Minkley 46:31

I think I don't, I wouldn't say that. This is the Glee's fault that that happened. Like, I think you've got a I don't want to go through it because it is fairly complicated. And there's lots of personalities involved. But, you know, it comes with a certain sense of like, if you are a performer and you're on stage kicking ass, people will look up to you. So if you're performing on a bigger stage, and you have this regular thing going on, they will look up to you even more, which is something that happens in all communities, I believe So don't take it to heart. But I'm aware that you're a busy man, you have been extraordinarily generous with your time. I really appreciate it. But I think that's probably the best place to call it off. But

Mark Tughan 47:11

thanks very much. I'm so sorry. I mucked around on the first one. No, no, no, obviously, I just was one of those mornings where there was quite a lot to do. Like I say, there's only five of us kind of running this running the show. So

Richard Minkley 47:27

I was surprised that you gave me two interviews. I thought you'd be like, Look, I can give you 10 minutes. And that's it. But now you've been absolutely fantastic.

Mark Tughan 47:36

You're welcome. Thank you.

Richard Minkley 47:36

No worries, right. I'm going to stop recording now.

8. Ben Macpherson

8.1. Interview 1 of 2

a) Part 1 of 3

28th January 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

improv, Glee Club, Nottingham, form, people, university, drop-ins, running, space, long, remember, performing, troupe, shows, play, bronze, year, called, training

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Ben Macpherson

Richard Minkley 00:00

Okay so we are recording. For the record, this is the oral history interview for the improbable missions project. I've already forgotten what it's called. Improbable missions or history of Missimp we've got Ben MacPhearson being interviewed...

Ben Macpherson 00:10

Pherson. Ben Macpherson.

Richard Minkley 00:18

Ben Macpherson. So not, so fur as in furry not fear as in feary.

Ben Macpherson 00:23

Fear as in feary, yeah.

Richard Minkley 00:25

Ben Macpherson being interviewed by Richard Minkley at 10:23 on Tuesday the 28th of January 2020. Yeah let's begin.

Ben Macpherson 00:38

Hi.

Richard Minkley 00:38

Hi, how are you?

Ben Macpherson 00:39

I'm very well thanks, how are you?

Richard Minkley 00:40

I'm really happy to be here at last. Let's go straight into it.

Ben Macpherson 00:45

I'm enjoying the, sort of, mock formality, as though we don't already see each other at least twice a week already.

Richard Minkley 00:50

Yeah. This is... It's weird. I think the more formal stuff is out of the way now.

Ben Macpherson 00:55

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 00:55

But, go straight into it. What is your first memory of Missimp?

Ben Macpherson 01:01

So, my first memory of Missimp.

Richard Minkley 01:03

Yeah.

Ben Macpherson 01:04

Would have been... October 2011, when I went to see Missimp in action at The Glee Club with the University Of Nottingham improv Society. It would've been, yeah, October.

Richard Minkley 01:21

Yeah?

Ben Macpherson 01:22

I think I remember the lineup of the cast, as well.

Richard Minkley 01:25

Oh my days, who do you remember seeing?

Ben Macpherson 01:27

I remember seeing Martin, err, Martin Dewey-Findell. Nick Tyler, Marilyn Bird, I think Lloydie James Lloyd was in that, and I want to say Geoff Monk and Nick Parkhouse, I think with the six players that day. And it was the first proper improv show I'd seen. Weirdly not the first one I'd done, but the first show I'd seen.

Richard Minkley 01:57

So, you came as a group from the University, you said. What group was that?

Ben Macpherson 02:03

So that was the University Of Nottingham improv society which I think had been going about five years by that point. And it was the main society that I spent my time with while I was at university.

Richard Minkley 02:17

Did you get into improv at the University?

Ben Macpherson 02:20

I got into improv about a month before university. I was doing stand-up comedy and I was playing this little comedy festival down in Essex and there was... an improv team dropped out of performing at it. So, they put together a quick team of comedians to do it. We were awful we played about seven games of party quirks. And that was it.

Richard Minkley 02:45

What, just party quirks over and over and over again?

Ben Macpherson 02:48

Pretty much. pretty much just party quirks. It was not good.

Richard Minkley 02:51

Wow

Ben Macpherson 02:51

It was fun for those in the cast. I am not sure if it was the same for the audience but that was where the love affair began. Then I came to do improv.

Richard Minkley 03:03

Ok

Ben Macpherson 03:04

And saw Missimp within a month of starting it, sort of, starting it properly.

Richard Minkley 03:09

Okay, I have a question. I'm just gonna quickly, if you could lean forward, I just need to tweak your microphone because I've done a bad job of setting it up. This is the thing about editing it. I'll be able to delete that so no one will know.

Ben Macpherson 03:20

Beautiful

Richard Minkley 03:20

That's interesting so... What was your impression then because you said you started... You did some comedy, came into improv, did the University Of Nottingham. What was your impression of Missimp when you first saw them.

Ben Macpherson 03:33

So... I looked at them and they just seemed so... Tight and so professional. They were they were putting out good quality shows. Even before sort of all the rigours of established training courses and things came in. I mean I was watching it with novice eyes so, there's every chance they were absolutely awful but I remember watching it and being so impressed and thinking that's fantastic And getting more enthused by the society I was getting involved with because they had that association with these brilliant players.

Richard Minkley 04:11

So, there was an association between the University Of Nottingham and Missimp At that time.

Ben Macpherson 04:14

Yeah there was.

Richard Minkley 04:15

What, I'm interested, what was the Association however vague or informal it might be?

Ben Macpherson 04:21

So, it was, it was sort of like her cousinship really, you know,. We were improv groups in the same city. They were adults doing it so that was immediately impressive. Erm. And... It was sort of, you know, we swam in the same pond.

Richard Minkley 04:38

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 04:39

There wasn't sort of much crossover. Which is something that's never really developed to the extent I've always felt it could or should've done.

Richard Minkley 04:50

So it felt it felt that, so the... The University was kind of separate from Missimp. When did you go from... Well I was going to say go from the university stuff to do in Missimp stuff. Did you do any Missimp activities when you were at uni or was it just shows?

Ben Macpherson 05:07

So. I. The way the University Of Nottingham works is they had an audition and troupe that would be cast in usually the first week of November? So this is people with about five weeks improv experience at the lower end being asked to audition for a team and if they liked you, you got further training and like proper sort of structured training. If not you could go along to the drop-in sessions. And... At that time, rightly or wrongly, I was not cast for the show. Which was, to be fair, probably right. Had I been, I wouldn't of come along to Missimp stuff because... When I wasn't put in there, I thought, oh. So I'm not going to get as much training as them. That's a bit stupid I know where I can find training. Missimp runs drop-ins. So in, January 2012, I went to my first drop-in? ... Which was, yeah, about 7;30 Thursday just by Nottingham station. I can't remember the name of the building now, but it's currently being converted into flats or something. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 06:14

Was it, because I know there is the Hopkinson's gallery, which is got lots of party spaces in it, or was it one of the other ones further up the road.

Ben Macpherson 06:20

It was one of the other ones further up the road.

Richard Minkley 06:21

Right.

Ben Macpherson 06:22

So I joined after the Hopkinson stuff at wound down. So, sort of, in that,... Silver age of Missimp.

Richard Minkley 06:31

So you join when Hopkinson's had went down, so did they used to rehearse in Hopkinson's.

Ben Macpherson 06:36

To my understanding, yes, and they used to have shows there especially. And that was sort of, it was sort of... It was very casual, as I understand it, back then.

Richard Minkley 06:47

Ok

Ben Macpherson 06:49

Obviously they cast them and they rehearsed and stuff but it was... it wasn't nearly the production engine that we have now for making shows.

Richard Minkley 06:59

So you went to some Missimp drop-ins. Do you remember what the, kinda, deal was with the drop-ins, like what they were, how they worked?

Ben Macpherson 07:08

So, they worked very similarly to how they work now. A member of the community, usually one of the more experienced members, will run a session, usually taking a particular theme or or idea or gimmick that there are exploring. I remember one of the early sessions there at the theme of hats, so, Everybody brought along a different hat that was used to inspire characters and stuff. I think that was before I really understood characterisation, so I was basically just me in a different hat every time. That was really good fun,. That was run by Geoff Monk, one of the original members has now left Nottingham sadly.

Richard Minkley 07:55

I can see you looking ... Do you remember anything from the hats workshop?

Ben Macpherson 07:59

The same, well, the thing I remember most about all that time, it was in this tiny blue room. Weirdly similar to the one we are in right now.

Richard Minkley 08:08

Oh.

Ben Macpherson 08:08

So we are recording in my dining room.

Richard Minkley 08:11

Yes

Ben Macpherson 08:12

Which is, probably about, five or 6 m by five or 6 m, pretty square.

Richard Minkley 08:18

I think you could give it that, yeah.

Ben Macpherson 08:21

Whereas we have a gentle eggshell blue on the walls, you have to imagine, and intense sort of ultramarine, like, deep, aggressive, nauseating blue. And, The floor was also painted blue. But it was boards, many of which Would creek and sometimes ever so slightly give way. It was a hell of a room.

Richard Minkley 08:47

How many people were coming to that room?

Ben Macpherson 08:49

They were probably... About... 10 to 12 people Going in there on a weekly basis? And that was... Weird and... It was a horrible place I'm so glad that we found every other place since.

Richard Minkley 09:08

So why was it a horrible place to do improv?

Ben Macpherson 09:10

It was a tiny little oppressive space. You felt like you could use it for psychological reconditioning or like...

Richard Minkley 09:16

Oh my God

Ben Macpherson 09:17

Yeah. It was, it was a cold dark little old Victorian factory room. Like, it would've been a Foreman's office or something originally. And it has been converted into this art space. It just... Smells of damp and... This intensity of these, like, everything was the shade... The same aggressive ultramarine blue, blasting in your eyes and you sort of feel like in this strange void that you were playing in.

Richard Minkley 09:50

Do you remember who else was there at that time, because you're talking about early 2012, I believe?

Ben Macpherson 09:56

Yeah, so that's eight years ago now. So we had faces like Nick, Marilyn, Martin, The people I've seen on stage... ... Then there were folks like ... Geoff who was still around back then.

Richard Minkley 10:14

This is Geoff Monk.

Ben Macpherson 10:15

Geoff Monk, yeah, who is one of the, the original Missimp folks. The other obvious face to bring up is Eddie, Eddie Owens, who, I think it started about three or four months before I did.... And... I think of that time he's the only one who still kind of around beside those people who I've mentioned now... and there were people who used to... We used to see more regularly and we see them every now and again but drop-ins but I think back then there was more of a focus on, 'we are a group of people

getting together in playing', and I think we now have more of a sense of direction and structure, which lends itself to people who want to practice, develop and get really good at improv. Whereas previously I think it was a bit more of the mess around session with your mates.

Richard Minkley 11:21

Because one of the things that you said brought you to the community was training?

Ben Macpherson 11:25

Yeah, so, we had at the University Of Nottingham, we had these, every Sunday there would be a drop-in session where you could go along and do some fun stuff, some cool stuff. You'd learn a principle or two of improv, and over the course of about a year you had a rough grounding in the basics.

Richard Minkley 11:47

So, was, I'm interested because I think and improve the idea of teaching is a very... There's lots of things in there. So what are the people running it particularly... What experience do they have to pass on or was it, sort of, more informal than that.

Ben Macpherson 12:06

So sessions were more informal. Some sessions were a lot more driven around practising specific skills. I always got the feeling that drop-ins were more of an experimental space back then. Whereas I think now we have, sort of, specialist areas like we've got shows where you can practice and develop your ideas, and you, sort of, have one of experimental workshops. Whereas because our community got larger and we have more of a public face, We have a commitment to make sure that our workshops are accessible to all and produce... Put up things at a similar quality level each time. Where as in those days because we had no promise save to each other, we could take more of a chance on things not being as polished and as sort of developed. It was a lot more ad hoc, from what I can tell.

Richard Minkley 13:23

Something I want to just double check on, you use the phrase skills and specific skills. Was that specific skills in relation to the Uni team who were, sort of. Because I understand that around, you started university in October 2011. Was it one foot in Missimp, one foot in the uni drop-ins, throughout university for you?

Ben Macpherson 13:46

Oh yes, yeah.

Richard Minkley 13:48

I tell you what, I'll ask now; What were you studying?

Ben Macpherson 13:50

So I was studying classics. Ancient Greek and Roman history, social history, sociology, religion. If they did it in the ancient Mediterranean world...

Richard Minkley 14:04

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 14:05

.. I could've studied it, Basically. So, anything from poetry through to architecture.

Richard Minkley 14:09

Fair enough. And so, what kind of skills do you remember... Because you use words like training and skills. What skills are you referring to?

Ben Macpherson 14:21

So, elements like, how to make a scene go forward. How to play a character. How to find humour, how to play with patterns. Those kind of things that we now package into Missimp syllabuses. And we get sort of lighter... Very narrow deep dives in some drop-ins.

Richard Minkley 14:49

Drop-ins now you mean?

Ben Macpherson 14:50

The drop-ins now that Missimp runs.

Richard Minkley 14:51

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 14:54

We get the deep dives on those and more of a focused Practice... I'd lost my train of thought.

Richard Minkley 15:03

No no it's very interesting. So we were at a point where you just kind of come into the Missimp world. Did it just continue like that, having you, one foot in the uni team, In the uni society, one foot in Missimp...

Ben Macpherson 15:18

Yeah

Richard Minkley 15:19

... Throughout university or did your relationship in either of those groups develop while you were there.

Ben Macpherson 15:25

So both developed. When I found improv I... I have gone to uni knowing in the end I wanted to write, and make comedy especially. And improv was a tool for that, for me. So I think that was... when I found out I wasn't going to get any more structured training of that trip, I saw Missimp as my way to get that, those skills I was lacking. And then I was still having a good time with the university troupe I wasn't going to change that at all, so I carried on with Missimp and the university troupe. It was two hours on a Thursday, two hours on a Sunday and that was how it was until second year where I got cast in the troupe and it became... Two hours on a Monday, two hours on a Thursday, two hours on a Wednesday and it sort of carried on until i was doing about 10 hours a week have improved.

Richard Minkley 16:27

Wow

Ben Macpherson 16:28

Oh yeah.

Richard Minkley 16:28

So there's a lot of things to break down there. First of all, was Missimp still doing, you said two hours on Thursday? Was that the Missimp drop-in? That, back then?

Ben Macpherson 16:38

The Missimp drop-in, yeah.

Richard Minkley 16:40

I'm assuming that the two hours on Monday two hours on a Tuesday two hours on a Wednesday. was it two hours on a Tuesday was the society, and the extra Monday and Wednesday was like the troupe?

Ben Macpherson 16:49

Yeah, the troupe training, yeah that sort of thing.

Richard Minkley 16:52

So you use the word troupe there, what do you mean by troupe?

Ben Macpherson 16:56

Troupe. So, In the context of Nottingham University the troupe is the selected group of players who would headline the significant shows and would develop longer form projects to take up to things like the Edinburgh festival or have a run at a local theatre.

Richard Minkley 17:16

Ok. When did you... So you didn't get in in the first year. So then was it just a year of, doing lots of improv as part of the drop-in in the University and Missimp and then you going to the trip afterwards?

Ben Macpherson 17:28

So I thought, 'well this sucks. I'm not gonna have this happen again. I'm going to make sure I am ready and able by the next time auditions come round'. And I was. So I got in.

Richard Minkley 17:41

What was it like being in the troupe?

Ben Macpherson 17:44

That was weirdly disappointing. They had this bazaar structure of leveling's that meant that even though I was in the troupe I sort of wasn't. They, they set up a system of gold silver and bronze troupe members. I can see your face already changing with this. It is awful as it sounded, so, gold were long form specialists they were going to be trained and taking up to the Edinburgh festival. They would do the show at the Nottingham New Theatre, at the Nottingham University. There was silver members, who were maybe didn't have enough time to commit so they will definitely do the Nottingham New Theatre show. They got proper long form training and then they weren't going to do the Edinburgh run. That changed because they decided not to change the format of the show. So they just had gold members and bronze members.

Richard Minkley 18:45

Ok

Ben Macpherson 18:46

Who were me and a friend of mine called Tim, who is now one of the voices on the Stella Firma podcast, which is an improv podcast. And...

Richard Minkley 18:57

What was Tim's... Tim... what was his surname?

Ben Macpherson 18:59

Meredith

Richard Minkley 19:00

Tim Meredith

Ben Macpherson 19:01

And he came along and did a few Missimp things as well.

Richard Minkley 19:11

That's interesting, so you and your friend Tim were in the bronze and everyone else was in the gold.

Ben Macpherson 19:23

Yeah, yeah. And we were specified as, we were short form specialists, meaning we could consistently deliver funny material but they either didn't want to or didn't feel able to train us to do long form stuff. Which is a croc of bull because Tim is one of the finest long form improvises I've, knew and know to this day.

Richard Minkley 19:42

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 19:43

Yeah. He is a very talented, very talented performer. And I was not bad. But yeah. That unfairness and the person who ran the troupe couldn't see that it was divisive labelling the levels gold silver and bronze and then getting rid of the silver level.

Richard Minkley 20:10

So, there are two things I want to explore. I want to explore some of the improv concepts in there but first of all I just wanna know what was it like being in bronze, silver being dismantled and then there's just gold.

Ben Macpherson 20:21

It was... It was pretty upsetting, to be honest. Also this was at a point where I have now started performing with Missimp at The Glee Club on a national comedy stage and it's like, "do you think I'm bronze? In the last two years I've crammed more improv than you have done in three." It's like, hmmm, it's a little, it's a little on the nose.

Richard Minkley 20:45

So you were performing at The Glee Club at that point.

Ben Macpherson 20:47

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 20:47

So, I tell you what I'm going to finish my thoughts about the gold and bronze level thing and then will come to The Glee Club. So, you said one of the differences between gold and bronze, because silver apparently didn't exist, is the long form was gold.

Ben Macpherson 21:06

Yeah

Richard Minkley 21:07

And you were short from specialists...

Ben Macpherson 21:08

Yes

Richard Minkley 21:09

... In bronze. Do you want to just explain, from your Perspective, what the difference between those two kinds of improv are.

Ben Macpherson 21:15

So...

Richard Minkley 21:16

Or were in that particular setting.

Ben Macpherson 21:19

At the University?

Richard Minkley 21:21

Sure

Ben Macpherson 21:22

So., a generic sort of definition. Short form is individuals standalone games and scenes that exist as individual units without ties in between them. Long form is a piece of improvisation that is tied together by either narrative or theme, that is a complete show and if you were to take any one element of that show is less than the sum of its parts.

Richard Minkley 22:01

Ok.

Ben Macpherson 22:04

Or the show

Richard Minkley 22:05

I'll ask your opinion on this, because this may not be historical fact but I think it's an important thing to have in context, the reputation between short form and long form. And calling one gold and one bronze illustrate how long form could've been seen as better or more sophisti...

Ben Macpherson 22:24

sophisticated, yeah.

Richard Minkley 22:24

A higher standard and short form is a lower standard.

Ben Macpherson 22:27

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 22:28

Was that the kind of, I'm assuming that was the case.

Ben Macpherson 22:31

I think that sadly is the case and I think it is often the case in most places. I think because great long form is something quite transformative and magical and there are very few master practitioners of long form to that level out there. And those are the ones who everyone aspires to be. If you go to most improv training, it is training you for long form. Some say because it's more satisfying some say because it's purer improv. If you have got short form you do have the handholds of rules of the game or a pattern or a known route of behaviour. And I think some people either don't engage with that as much, and view it is the bastard cousin of pure improv, which I find very irritating, quite elitist. I am not as good at short form as I was. I've done a lot more long form work and that is sort of a muscle that has lost some toning for me. But really good short form is immediately satisfying to an audience. If you view improv as an artistic product as opposed to a process or whatever, which to a certain extent, we do have to sit back and reflect that if we are doing these as shows, we must look at it as a creative product. Short form gets left foot. It gets results. Not that all improv should chase laughs but in terms of getting people interested, getting people engaged, short form is far more accessible than long form and, it can be a lot harder to do at that master level. And I think because so much of the improv tradition both here and in the states is by actors, who want to make plays and theatre pieces, there is almost a disregard for short form improv that it is trite, it's trivial, it's a tool. When it's entirely down to personal preference. It's like saying, "oh your rap music is the bastard cousin to my opera".

Richard Minkley 25:27

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 25:27

It's like "no, that's an entirely different language and an entirely different culture that surrounds it". And to write one off as better or harder is doing a disservice to the people who have worked to develop the things in it. The people who come up with new games that test different improv skills as you play them. All the people who enjoy it. You're poo-poo-ing your audience if you're saying that one is greater or lesser than the other.

Richard Minkley 25:58

That's interesting. I'm going to bring us back though because you talked about you were part of the troupe of Uni Of whilst were also performing with the Missimp.

Ben Macpherson 26:08

Yeah

Richard Minkley 26:08

Do you remember when you started performing with them, not just drop-ins, but actual shows.

Ben Macpherson 26:12

I want to say, It was, I think it was, October or November 2012.

Richard Minkley 26:28

So it was about a year later.

Ben Macpherson 26:30

Yeah. It must've been October 2012 that I started performing on stage with Missimp. Because I remember thinking oh that's an impressive thing to have just a head of troupe auditions. Because I still attached a lot of my self-worth to what my peers thought. And I still do but, yeah. I remember those feelings.

Richard Minkley 26:57

That's interesting. So, how did you get into a Missimp show? I said that as if you weren't allowed in. Like, How did that happen?

Ben Macpherson 27:11

I was asked, "Do you want to do the show on this date?". So, I don't remember who was the show runner at that time. It might have been... I think it was Nick who ask me or maybe Lloydie and.

Richard Minkley 27:25

For the record is this Nick also known as Parky?

Ben Macpherson 27:27

No, this is Nick Tyler

Richard Minkley 27:28

Nick Tyler.

Ben Macpherson 27:29

Yeah. And, I said "yeah of course" because it's getting up in front of an audience. That's what I want my life to be.

Richard Minkley 27:40

That's the deal.

Ben Macpherson 27:41

That's the deal.

Richard Minkley 27:42

So you performed at The Glee Club. Where was The Glee Club at that point?

Ben Macpherson 27:49

So The Glee Club was at I think it's British waterways house. The same place it is at the moment. Down by the Nottingham canal in an old converted barge warehouse. And we were playing in the top room there, which is a huge, two tier auditorium. We used to only open the ground floor because we wouldn't get the audiences in to open the balcony. But we were... When I started we were getting solid sort of, 100, 120 or so along.

Richard Minkley 28:29

Wow

Ben Macpherson 28:29

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 28:34

How were those shows? Do you remember anything that you did?

Ben Macpherson 28:38

Oh, not at all. Not at all.

Richard Minkley 28:39

Is it all just blank?

Ben Macpherson 28:40

Yeah. What can i remember of those times? I think the overwhelming memory is just excited that I was included and that I had been given the opportunity by a group of people who were one, older than me and judged me interesting enough to... To be part of it.

Richard Minkley 29:10

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 29:12

And, you know, you played all the standard short form games like change, whose line is it anyway. All sorts of different little games that exist and have 100 different names depending on what community you're in.

Richard Minkley 29:31

Yeah. So I know whose line is the one where you pull lines out of a hat but the audience of written?

Ben Macpherson 29:38

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 29:38

Change, is it the one with the bell where they perform a thing and you ring the bell when you want them to change what they say?

Ben Macpherson 29:43

Yeah. Sometimes it's called new choice or should've said and you just tap the bell or airhorn or whatever we are using as the noise in this show.

Richard Minkley 29:54

What did you use?

Ben Macpherson 29:55

It was a bell for Missimp I have been to stuff where they've had stuff like fog horns and yeah. And you play through a 45 minute first half, a 35 minute second-half. You'd do probably about 10 games a show, and you have an absolute blast with it. We always start with story story die because it got everyone on stage and got the audience up for it and yelling. And then we immediately start saying "don't yell now, don't yell now". And I remember those shows were always compared by Nick who is a sublime host. He has such a good read on energy and I... You trust him immediately when you see Nick get on stage and host a show. If anyone ever comes to one of our gorilla burger drop-ins, and he's hosting those he just has this sort of... "right. Let's get on with it, we're all going to have fun right now" sort of attitude and it's just lovely to have as the host for it.

Richard Minkley 31:11

So at this point in the story we've, well it's not really a story it's your life but.

Ben Macpherson 31:17

its okay I like to think of myself as a protagonist.

Richard Minkley 31:20

Yeah. It's kind of 2012, you are performing with Missimp and you in the bronze tier of the troupe.

Ben Macpherson 31:30

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 31:30

No it seems that, for a student at that point, your life is segmented into which academic year you're in.

Ben Macpherson 31:35

Yeah

Richard Minkley 31:35

So I lean into that. Was that academic year, one foot in the bronze tier and one foot in the Missimp world?

Ben Macpherson 31:41

Pretty much. As that year carried on, I'd been getting... I'd also been starting to travel to do extra training around the country. Like going down to London, that kind of thing. Learning from teachers who travelled from overseas. Missimp had started to bring some people in from the UCB theatre out in,

Richard Minkley 32:05

When you say "Bring people in", who did they bring in?

Ben Macpherson 32:07

So. We had... The one that's really sticking out, or there are two people who are really sticking out for me. One of them is a guy called Alan Starzynski. And he talked a lot about, sort of forms and formats for it. And that was where I learned... That's where I first learned about the Armando.

Richard Minkley 32:32

Really?

Ben Macpherson 32:32

Which is the form that my current team, the vox pops, do.

Richard Minkley 32:40

For the record I am also in that team.

Ben Macpherson 32:43

Yes

Richard Minkley 32:43

So, there is Providence there.

Ben Macpherson 32:45

Yeah. So in 2012 I learnt about that format and then we had Shannon O'Neill, who was head of the UCB training centre for a while, come along. And she also... What did she teach? She taught a lot of pattern and game work. So spotting devices to use in long form. And it's sort of when we start bringing international teachers that we really start swinging towards a long form focus. So before, I'd say, late 2011/early 2012.

Richard Minkley 33:26

Yeah.

Ben Macpherson 33:28

In fact no it must've been early 2012, because I went back to for my Easter holidays the week that the guy arrived to run the workshop. So early 2012 a guy, I think his name was Brandon Gardner, came out and gave a workshop of the back of it. And he sort of helped kindle the sparks that were already sort of going for Long form improvisation and then there was...

Richard Minkley 34:04

Did they all come from UCB?

Ben Macpherson 34:07

So, the man who really drove long form improv, and sort of one of the motivating forces behind it in Missimp was Lloydie. And Lloydie had done a lot of study and focus with UCB. That was where he sort of found a style that worked for him and that was how we got into it. But then other people have gone on and picked up other things and brought those back to tie together.

Richard Minkley 34:34

So, we are in 2012, you're performing with the team and you're learning more long form stuff from these teachers.

Ben Macpherson 34:41

Yeah

Richard Minkley 34:42

How long did that go on for? Oh, here's a question. Are you still in that blue room? The oppressive horrible space?

Ben Macpherson 34:48

So, that is the point where that sort of winds down. That must've been that year that that wound down and we moved to a disused office space on Stoney Street. Almost opposite Annie's burger shack or where it is now. I think it was number 46 Stoney Street? There was a local online content provider called I think it was Zoo News, or Zoo TV. And a couple of people were involved in making, I want to say it was called Zoo News. And it was improvise new stories, which was fine and funny. Off the back of that we got to use one of their spare spaces for free, or for very little, which meant that we had a home again with heating and a lift, toilets.

Richard Minkley 35:47

Oh my days. And was it, this is important for the record, was it as blue as the other room?

Ben Macpherson 35:53

It was not as blue as the other room. It was a lovely corporate white and beige.

Richard Minkley 35:59

Oh very nice.

Ben Macpherson 36:01

Actually, that was... Because at that time we didn't have... It's the period I remember with, where everyone has wheelie chairs. So we gather office furniture for the seats which of course were all wheelie desk chairs. So, so that's a time where we started getting a little more interesting with staging for a few... Probably about a year also we were there. Because we had wheelchairs and could mess around on them. And I can remember that quite fondly. I recall, I think it was Nick Tyler, just to jetting himself across as scene. He started with his feet, I think it was against the wall, and he just kicked off and it was about a 30 second scene, where we had the scene whilst he was just drifting across, having kicked himself off and carrying on the momentum.

Richard Minkley 36:48

In the Stoney Street days, will you still short form or... You said you were doing short form and kind of building up long form with these teachers who are coming in.

Ben Macpherson 36:55

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 36:56

With the teachers coming in and doing it in that Stoney Street chapter or,

Ben Macpherson 37:00

Yes. They were. They were to some extent. It's so hard to place those years.

Richard Minkley 37:09

You don't need to be precise.

Ben Macpherson 37:11

Yes, it was around about then because partway through the year we left... We were there for about nine, nine or 10 months.

Richard Minkley 37:20

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 37:21

Then we moved to what was City Gallery and is now Five Leaves bookshop.

Richard Minkley 37:31

Sorry I just ripped a bit of paper and he's going to come up on the recording. So, you went from where to where?

Ben Macpherson 37:38

From number 46 Stoney Street, I'm certain it's number 46 Stoney Street, I can fact check that for you. And from there we went to City Gallery, which was a little art exhibition space and had a tiny stage. And it's just off the square tucked behind Primark.

Richard Minkley 37:59

And it's Five Leaves now?

Ben Macpherson 38:00

It's now Five Leaves bookshop.

Richard Minkley 38:01

Which is a kind of radical bookshop.

Ben Macpherson 38:04

Yeah, left-leaning, right thinking, type.

Richard Minkley 38:09

Yeah, lots of interesting stuff going on on those shelves.

Ben Macpherson 38:10

Yeah, interesting good thought-provoking books.

Richard Minkley 38:13

Yeah, so let's jump forward. I'm assuming so... we've gone from 2011, the year that started for you, that started 2011/2012. 2013, were you on a three year degree?

Ben Macpherson 38:25

Yeah, a three year course.

Richard Minkley 38:29

So what was your last year of university like in terms of your improv life?

Ben Macpherson 38:33

So, partway through my second year, the person who's been running the regular drop-ins at the University wasn't able to carry on with them anymore. I still don't know the exact circumstances on it but I took over running Sunday drop-ins. In, halfway through my second year.

Richard Minkley 39:00

Where are you still a bronze tier member?

Ben Macpherson 39:02

I was. But had again, sort of this weird discrepancy between the amount of training and the amount I was allowed to do. But yeah, so I started running the Sunday drop-ins and then applied to become creative director of the society, which I was. So I ran, carried on running drop-ins running into my third year. So I'd already had half a year's experience doing them ahead of...

Richard Minkley 39:33

I'm going to ask you there, what was it like going from participating to leading workshops?

Ben Macpherson 39:41

I remember it being quite intimidating. I think, especially at university, you're very aware of your age because you still have that legacy from school where what year you are in matters.

Richard Minkley 39:54

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 39:55

As opposed to actually who you are, what you do and the benefits of that. So I'd,... Been intimidated by the people I was expecting to listen to me and you do it three or four times and you sort of just get used to it. And you're like, "Right, this is who I am, I do know what I'm talking about. Let's go for it".

Richard Minkley 40:26

Do you remember the first drop-in that you ran?

Ben Macpherson 40:28

No, not at all.

Richard Minkley 40:31

Do you remember anything about it? Do you think it went well or was it?

Ben Macpherson 40:38

It must've gone fairly well because I got elected to do the job properly afterwards.

Richard Minkley 40:41

In that case, let's go to the... After a while you became creative director of the university troupe?

Ben Macpherson 40:46

Yeah, and I try to foster more links between the University and Missimp. So, actually giving shout outs to Missimp drop-ins and shout outs for Uni Of shows, and trying to get cross pollination between the two.

Richard Minkley 41:04

What does it mean to be the creative director of a university improv troupe?

Ben Macpherson 41:12

Very little actually. I had grand plans, as only a naïve 20-year-old can. But I had hoped to establish more accessible Long form training for the regular members who weren't in the troupe. And I sort of wanted to... I wanted to see a de-escalation of the importance of these 6 to 8 people who were going to get all the training because that, one, didn't seem fair to me and two, it can take someone, you know... If you're doing auditions after six weeks, what if the person who really wants to do it doesn't come out of their shell until week seven or week eight. So I wanted to make sure that people had that opportunity and try to democratise it a little bit more. Which I made some progress with. And it has since developed on since then.

Richard Minkley 42:28

So 2013. I must ask, how old were you when you were in your creative directorship?

Ben Macpherson 42:36

I was 20/21.

Richard Minkley 42:38

So in your third year, which was basically.

Ben Macpherson 42:41

13/14

Richard Minkley 42:43

13/14, 20/21.

Ben Macpherson 42:44

Yeah

Richard Minkley 42:45

Are you still... Was it still performing at, basically Stoney Street, performing at The Glee and the university troupe and practicing at the, it was the new theatre that you mentioned you performed out with the university troupe?

Ben Macpherson 43:01

Yeah, yeah. So I've gone to a few events in a few different things. I think Missimp at that point we had left... so we've gone from City Gallery, and we were there for about half a year. And then we had a moved to The Corner on Stoney Street, which is now Oscar and Rosie's pizza place, opposite the old angel microbrewery.

Richard Minkley 43:33

Yes

Ben Macpherson 43:33

Which was one of the affordable art spaces we were able to get through a group called the Art Organisation. which was brilliant and we had the space for a decent amount of money but also it was very cold and you felt like you were going to get a disease whenever you walked in this building.

Richard Minkley 43:50

Oh, I'm not going to let you get off with that then. We haven't talked about the specific places, but let's go into it. So I know a little bit about the office environment. What was City Gallery like?

Ben Macpherson 43:59

So, City Gallery was basically a white walled space and you never knew what you were going to see on the walls each week.

Richard Minkley 44:06

Oh, was it sort of like an actual gallery space?

Ben Macpherson 44:08

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 44:08

Ok

Ben Macpherson 44:10

It had a little stage in it. It was nice.

Richard Minkley 44:11

Yeah?

Ben Macpherson 44:12

It was fine. It was fun. They sometimes had, they had like a little café thing that they could do from there on the gorilla burger nights. We used to have that kept open. You could get like coffees and drinks and things.

Richard Minkley 44:26

We kind of skipped over this, but, was a gorilla burger running throughout your time with Missimp, so late 2011 to, we're in late 2014-ish now?

Ben Macpherson 44:37

So, gorilla burger must've started in 2013.

Richard Minkley 44:41

Ok.

Ben Macpherson 44:42

Because I remember it happening at the City Arts, not the City Arts, the City Gallery.

Richard Minkley 44:50

Now Five Leaves?

Ben Macpherson 44:51

Now Five Leaves, yeah.

Richard Minkley 44:52

Ok. Do you remember the first gorilla burger?

Ben Macpherson 44:56

Yeah, it was... The way it used to work, there was like an improv karaoke bit, like we have at the moment where its names and games from a hat and you request what you want to play.

Richard Minkley 45:10

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 45:10

And then there was a...

Richard Minkley 45:12

Tell you what, just a dig into that. Improv karaoke, is that the name of the format or is it a game?

Ben Macpherson 45:18

That's the branding with attached to it.

Richard Minkley 45:20

Ok.

Ben Macpherson 45:20

So, the idea is that you might play anything but they've got a list of things you can choose from, you know, you pull it out and do the bit in front of a group of friends at a moderate level of intoxication.

Richard Minkley 45:33

So is this where the format is kind of, because at the minute the thing I know about gorilla burger is that, you basically have two hats. One with names in, one with Games. You put a name out of a hat. You asked them where do you want to do a scene or a game, and if they wanna do again you put a game out the game hat.

Ben Macpherson 45:51

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 45:51

Is that the basic format that you had back in the beginning?

Ben Macpherson 45:53

Pretty much. The one different thing was that there was, kind of, like a micro headliner, which would be like a little experimental team. So I remember, it was at this point we have been experimenting with musical improv for a couple of years very gently. After some workshops with Heather Errcart and Jeremy Samuels from the Maydays. One of the shows, one of the little micro things was the

Nottingham city blues, or something like that, and it was a police procedural they also had a blues songs in it. It was a lot of fun. I, yeah. It was wonderful and baffling.

Richard Minkley 46:43

Was that the name of the team?

Ben Macpherson 46:46

Team is too strong a word. It was a loose group of people who are pulled together by, I wanna say it was Eddie who pulled it together.

Richard Minkley 46:54

Really?

Ben Macpherson 46:55

I think so. But yeah, they were fun.

Richard Minkley 47:02

Then we went to, so you did gorilla burger there and you went to The Corner and caught some diseases I believe?

Ben Macpherson 47:08

Yeah, so it was a very cold space. Not the cleanest. Had this weird stage which was about... If you imagine the average stage should be 3 foot off the ground, this was 4 foot off the ground but also it meant that you were just slightly too close to the ceiling. And it made it a little uncomfortable to play on are you always thought you were going to fall off it.

Richard Minkley 47:34

So The Corner was a converted space, it wasn't a particular theatre space.

Ben Macpherson 47:38

Yeah. And I want to say it had been like either an office building or...

Richard Minkley 47:46

Well, knowing the space, it's in the historic area of the city called the Lace market, so I'm assuming it would've been a lace factory, wouldn't it?

Ben Macpherson 47:52

Possibly. It was definitely a new a build.

Richard Minkley 47:55

Could be, could be.

Ben Macpherson 47:56

Because maybe possibly 60s or 70s put up is maybe like a show room space or something like that.

Richard Minkley 48:06

Sorry, that history is been recorded. Screw it. Let's find some more history to record. That's fascinating. So, 2013/2014 you were performing. Where are you performing at The Glee Club still then?

Ben Macpherson 48:18

Yeah, by that point I was sort of one of the permanent players for The Glee Club. So depending on regularity and was around, the core players performed about... If we had 11 shows a year you'd perform nine or 10 of them?

Richard Minkley 48:39

11 shows a year?

Ben Macpherson 48:41

Yeah. So, it was once a month at The Glee Club.

Richard Minkley 48:43

And is that how it's been running throughout that whole time? you've basically been once a month you get a show at The Glee Club?

Ben Macpherson 48:47

Yeah, absolutely. That's at a point where we're starting to see the tail off of audiences there. Whether that is complacency on our part or a lack of support from the venue, I'm not sure. I feel it was probably more lack of venue support, like they weren't listing us properly on their website, which made it difficult to sell tickets.

Richard Minkley 49:11

So explain... I'm very interested in the decline of The Glee Club era.

Ben Macpherson 49:16

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 49:17

When did you notice that there was a decline happening?

Ben Macpherson 49:22

So. I oversaw the death knell of The Glee Club.

Richard Minkley 49:28

HA! I'm sorry that's very rude of me to laugh at but.

Ben Macpherson 49:31

That's okay, don't worry.

Richard Minkley 49:31

You did say it with a smile on your face though, for the record.

Ben Macpherson 49:33

That's okay. I first properly noticed it, September/October 2014. So I was straight out of uni. I was finding my first job and I was sort of given The Glee Club to look after. And, sort of, possibly a bit too early or without sort of any training or thoughts into how it happened. In fact definitely without any sort of real coaching on what needed to be doing for that, which is something that we've worked to correct since we like now have more of a production mentor-y scheme where we ask people if they want to step up if they can.

Richard Minkley 50:19

Yeah.

Ben Macpherson 50:19

And then we'll sort of have a member of the committee able to go and help them and be with them whilst they get that done. Also, sort of, more collaborative projects, so committee members have got the knowledge about what they need to do.

Richard Minkley 50:34

So let's... I'm going to bring you back. When did you, I was going to say inherit as if someone had died. When did you begin to help run things at missing? As in like drop ins or a show.

Ben Macpherson 50:46

I want to say I ran my first drop-in in 2013? Maybe late 2012?

Richard Minkley 50:53

Ok

Ben Macpherson 50:53

I think it was about movement. I remember. Oh yeah that was it, it was called M.A.R.D.I.S. like the T.A.R.D.I.S. but it was for 'mime and relative dimensions in space'. It was all about physicality and object work and I was using it as a way of clearing my own thoughts on it.

Richard Minkley 51:16

We've come to the point where we probably need to wrap up for the first half of our interview. I would just like to, before we go, ask you about that time of watching The Glee Club run off, as you've described it. What do you think, what happened there?

Ben Macpherson 51:37

So, I think that as a community we were taking The Glee Club for granted a bit. We weren't really pushing or promoting the show. And with any sort of complacency like that becomes of fatigue. And you see it with sort of any kind of residency. Unless you're bringing new high quality stuff every time, then you can see a deterioration with that. It didn't help that we weren't getting supported by the venue very strongly whether that was because we weren't asking for that support when we should've been, or because they weren't taking active [incomprehensible] with that, I don't know. I'm not going to be the one to point the finger on that. But we sort of saw that there were months, having sort of had 90/100 people, we then started saying 40 then 30 then 20. You suddenly became aware of the very large space you were playing in. And what had been a very warm fun space felt very cold, very empty. We were still having fun on stage, but if you don't have the audience there to have that sort of activation energy for laughter, then you are battling an uphill battle and the show sort of slunk away quietly really.

Richard Minkley 53:12

Do you remember when the moment it officially stopped was?

Ben Macpherson 53:17

Yes. It was, I think it was the summer or something. Yeah I wanna say it was the summer. It was like, it might even have been May. My birthday is at the end of May, and the show was always towards the end of May. And I remember feeling so guilty and ashamed that I had let this show die. Ignoring the fact that it was far from just me who caused it and all the shows have a natural life and the ship was already sinking when I was given command of it. The captain had run away.

Richard Minkley 54:01

Do you remember why you were given command of it?

Ben Macpherson 54:03

I think because I had been stepping up and doing more work. I got opinions on how things ought to be done and I care about running stuff. I was, I think I started doing a little bit of teaching by then.

Richard Minkley 53:17

And when you say teaching, you mean like running the drop-ins?

Ben Macpherson 54:01

Running the drop-ins, but also I had co-taught one of the courses for the first time. So 2014 is the first year that Missimp starts running proper courses.

Richard Minkley 54:20

2015 did you say?

Ben Macpherson 54:34

14.

Richard Minkley 54:34

2014, that's interesting. I think that might be a good point to leave it on and have a quick break.

Ben Macpherson 54:41

Yeah sure.

b) Part 2 of 3

28th January 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Nottingham, improv, people, Fisticuffs, member, game, Glee Club, courses, teaching, corner, comedy, point, scenes, regular, called, job, university, bit, drop-ins, teach

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Ben Macpherson

Richard Minkley 00:00

Okay so we are back. It is 1130 on Tuesday, the 28th of January 2020. Richard Minkley is interviewing Ben Macpherson for the improbable missions oral history project. We left off in the last bit, The Glee Club had just wound down.

Ben Macpherson 00:21

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 00:22

You mentioned you started doing courses.

Ben Macpherson 00:26

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 00:27

Do you remember the circumstances around where the idea of doing courses came from?

Ben Macpherson 00:32

So, courses came from Lloydie, I think most actively. He'd run a couple of little workshops and sort of weekend things and then came up with a six week level one/level two course.

Richard Minkley 00:57

So, a six week level one and a six week level two, or like...

Ben Macpherson 01:00

A six week level one and a six week level two, two separate courses.

Richard Minkley 01:07

Yeah.

Ben Macpherson 01:07

I did the level two course with him. And I think there might have been a level three he ran as well. But I did that with him as well. On that generation of improvisers I don't think there's any really left. At that point there wasn't really the mechanics to go on after courses.

Richard Minkley 01:34

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 01:37

I think there are certain personal and personality conflicts that also existed there. Without sort of a... If we imagine sort of a nursery pool going into, like, going into the shallows before going out to swim in the big ocean, there wasn't really a nursery pool so the current took people away a little bit. I know a few of those people are still active in the Nottingham sphere. I know a lot of them are doing clowning workshops now, which are quite exciting. Amanda Schofield.

Richard Minkley 02:17

That's interesting. So you mention Amanda Schofield. You use the phrase generation. Could you... Who is in that generation? I know it makes them sound like geriatrics which is unfair but what was that generation in your head?

Ben Macpherson 02:34

So, I think of myself as third-generation Missimp. So they were the original founding members who are back in the 90s, 98. And then that era ended I think when Nick Tyler became the main driving force behind improv in Nottingham which I want to say was mid 2000 but I'm not the person to ask about that.

Richard Minkley 03:16

Don't worry, we'll get him. So Nick Tyler wasn't part of the original 98 group?

Ben Macpherson 03:22

No, he joined about five years afterwards and then... The last remaining member was Geoff He went off to Canada for a few years and so Nick took on responsibility.

Richard Minkley 03:38

Geoff Monk

Ben Macpherson 03:40

Nick Tyler took on responsibility for it and that was when we had regular drop-in starting and more regular shows came up at the Hopkinson gallery. Then you sort of get the introduction of people like Lloydie and Parkey into the organisational sphere, and I think that's sort of when the third generation properly starts. And I sort of say that when Missimp to get to The Glee Club, it was that third generation, that's where I pop up and start turning up. And that's where the longer term members that we see today start sort of popping up in. And then we have this step where we start actively running courses and we have a more active drive to grow. Because I think previously there had been a feeling that we were happy with how things were and I can remember a change being when we actually started talking about "okay, where are we taking Missimp? What is the direction we are going in now?".

Richard Minkley 05:04

I'm gonna put my finger on that very moment.

Ben Macpherson 05:06

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 05:08

Why did that decision... Why did that sense of... both asking what are we doing with this and deciding where it came from, what was happening then?

Ben Macpherson 05:21

So, that was at the point... so that was... We were still at The Glee residency then. We were starting to get people over. we had more sense of teaching and direction and the first team proper had formed. So rather than having a pool of players who was called upon that was the first long form team in Nottingham called Fisticuffs who are Martin, Lloydie, Trilly, who now does a lot of improv in London, and a guy called Brendan who is now based in Liverpool, who are meeting up once a week to explore long form.

Richard Minkley 06:14

I know you mentioned Lloydie and Martin before. Do you remember any surnames for Triley and Brendan? Was Trilly his given name or was it like trilbert or something?

Ben Macpherson 06:23

It was Trilitron Chatterjee, but we called him Trilly because.

Richard Minkley 06:27

trilitron Chatterjee

Ben Macpherson 06:28

trilitron. Chatterjee. First name. Surname. And then I want to say Brendan Curtis? I can find these names for you.

Richard Minkley 06:37

Ok, That may be useful but we've got some idea of it on record. So they made Fisticuffs, and was that the first team, you said?

Ben Macpherson 06:44

Yeah or Proto team, probably. And they invited folks like Nick, myself, into it to do a few things, then I became a more regular member and Trilly and Brendan moved away in fairly quick concession from each other. And it became a night where we could experiment with long form things every Tuesday.

Richard Minkley 07:15

I was going to say, what did Fisticuffs do?

Ben Macpherson 07:18

So, Fisticuffs did... It started off sort of montages , then we explored a show format, I can't remember what we used to call it now, but we would take the opening 2 to 3 scenes worth of a movie, we would do as much of the script as we fancied and then just chuck it away and make up the rest of the movie.

Richard Minkley 07:44

Oh, so you just sort of... So Fisticuffs format after they tried doing a montage was to get the first few scenes from an actual film.

Ben Macpherson 07:52

Yeah

Richard Minkley 07:52

then improvise the rest?

Ben Macpherson 07:54

Yeah

Richard Minkley 07:55

Do you remember any of those shows?

Ben Macpherson 07:58

Oh, all sorts. So they weren't shows. These were pretty much all rehearsals.

Richard Minkley 08:02

I see.

Ben Macpherson 08:06

We did, let's see, I remember we did Les Misérables. Just after that musical had come out, that was just awful. We did a version of gladiator in front of an audience that was incredible. Martin was the standout character from that he was a very wimpy centurion.

Richard Minkley 08:35

Tell me more about that. That gladiator show was it their first show? Or was it just a show?

Ben Macpherson 08:40

It was just a show. There have been a few other shows before that.

Richard Minkley 08:45

Do you remember when or where they used to perform?

Ben Macpherson 08:50

So I can remember that gladiator show being at City Gallery.

Richard Minkley 09:09

Yeah

Ben Macpherson 09:11

I can remember, I think the Les Miserables was over in a rehearsal. I think we did a few at The Corner. And that was what started to develop into the Star Wars shows that we've done.

Richard Minkley 09:31

So it was unspeakable acts by Fisticuffs.

Ben Macpherson 09:47

Yeah. And then from that we sort of went on to doing mono scenes. Like, we take one location and we set a whole play there basically.

Richard Minkley 09:59

So you just, instead of editing away, you just stay in that one scene and keep going? No time jumps?

Ben Macpherson 10:06

No time jumps. Nope. Or... No there was no time jumps it was all just fairly grounded in one place.

Richard Minkley 10:15

Cos, You didn't put your name down as one of the Fisticuffs, but you did...

Ben Macpherson 10:19

I was invited in, in the end.

Richard Minkley 10:22

Because you use the phrase earlier regular member. And I just, I want to understand a little bit about how your experience with Missimp compared with that in the University. So, what does it mean to be a regular member of Missimp, for you. We've gone from early days in the...

Ben Macpherson 10:44

Blue room.

Richard Minkley 10:55

The blue room at what may not have been Hopkinson's gallery to now I believe we are in The Corner picking up some diseases.

Ben Macpherson 10:47

Yeah, yeah.

Richard Minkley 10:54

What does it mean to be a regular Missimp member?

Ben Macpherson 10:58

At that stage, it means coming along to the drop-ins frequently. So we probably see you 2 to 3 drop-ins a month.

Richard Minkley 11:08

And what's the alternative. Is there any other way of viewing participation in Missimp than being a regular member; because having a regular member suggests you have irregular members.

Ben Macpherson 11:19

Yeah, and they probably come along once a month also, every couple of months, just to drop-in. Improv is for a lot of those people just tends to be more of just like "oh, this is fun, this is cool", as opposed to "this is something I'm actually passion about, this is something I wanna learn about, get a good at", that kind of thing.

Richard Minkley 11:39

Yeah and I take it that there was no kind of formal nature to that.

Ben Macpherson 11:44

No. No. One of the discussions that has, jumping forward in the timeline, is the nature of what does it mean to be a Missimp member and how, how does the Missimp liability insurance covers our members, that kind of thing. And these were all discussions that we sort of had to have and they were questions about, "ok, well do we have a, like a membership subscription?" or something like that? And rather than have a sort of buy-in policy, its, we wanted to keep it more ad hoc for the drop-ins.

Richard Minkley 12:27

That's very interesting, but we will come back to that in due time. At the minute, I believe we are, and correct me if I'm wrong, he says frantically looking at his notes. We are in...

Ben Macpherson 12:41

The Corner, Fisticuffs.

Richard Minkley 12:42

The Corner, Fisticuffs. You've just left university.

Ben Macpherson 12:46

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 12:47

And you're talking about your first job. What was your first job?

Ben Macpherson 12:50

So, I was, throughout university I worked in the holidays for a High Street bank. And I just got a fixed job with them. Although it's worth noting that I decided to stay in Nottingham because of the support and friends I had in Missimp.

Richard Minkley 13:11

This is one of the things I'm interested in, so university ended.

Ben Macpherson 13:15

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 13:17

And you had your, well I mean, University is a big thing so you have your whole life ahead of you but what was that like, when you, like, you first finished university?

Ben Macpherson 13:28

I knew I was going to chase performing and writing in comedy. I didn't really have any connections in London and London is expensive. I I knew people in Nottingham, I knew of opportunities in Nottingham, I knew I could find more opportunities in Nottingham, so I stayed in Nottingham. And I knew I had a support network here, with the friends that I had through Missimp.

Richard Minkley 14:02

That's interesting. If it's too personal you don't have to say that but could you define what... the support network you have room Missimp? I know that this is delving from the, sort of, improv, structure of a community into your personal life but, I'm interested.

Ben Macpherson 14:26

So, I had people I care about and had show that they care about me. I had different members of the community at different times offered, like, "If you cannot find a place to stay let me know, I have a spare room you can come and live with me for a couple of months". Lots of little things that just show care and investment. Which was surprising. Not that the people I was improvising with were lovely and good kind people but to actually have that active tangible proof that's like if things get bad you can open this box you know. That was something quite surprising and incredibly moving. And made me feel okay about doing what I was doing, even when I was dealing with thoughts of selling out by getting a day job. There was a point where I started working, where I got horribly horribly depressed and tired, because I thought I was giving up on all of my ambitions and all of my dreams because that's what a 9-to-5 job is in my mind. It is an unnatural state for me. And I can remember talking with different members of Missimp, about finding progress and finding direction, when I was otherwise just despairing. And they helped me through some incredibly emotional tough times at a point where I felt I probably couldn't talk as much to my parents and my family, as I had this idea in my head of, "oh no, I'm independent now. I need to be doing this" and... "Adult", that horrendous idea.

Richard Minkley 16:46

So that kind of situation is where... So I suppose the bit that's bubbling away, that's the point where you left university, it's also the part where, I'm frantically looking at my notes...

Ben Macpherson 17:01

I start taking over The Glee Club?

Richard Minkley 17:03

Yeah, that's about that point isn't it?

Ben Macpherson 17:05

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 17:05

Which is interesting. So it's now... Your final year was 2013/14. So now it's 2014/2015, The Glee Club has events have stopped happening.

Ben Macpherson 17:23

Shuffled off.

Richard Minkley 17:24

Yeah, you're in The Corner. Yeah, you're in The Corner. You said that the first team came about, and you were kind of invited onto it to do some stuff. What happens next in Missimp's story? What was it like improvising in The Corner, because eventually you moved on and something changed?

Ben Macpherson 17:50

Yeah

Richard Minkley 17:51

Where are you teaching lessons, teaching courses at The Corner?

Ben Macpherson 17:53

I was, yeah. With Marilyn, especially, I was partnered up for a lot of teaching with. Some other folks as well.

Richard Minkley 18:04

And that was the level one course did you teach?

Ben Macpherson 18:07

I taught level ones and level twos.

Richard Minkley 18:09

Okay. What was it like teaching?

Ben Macpherson 18:14

It was great. Partly it was sharing a hobby, partly it was getting paid for working with improv. I make no bones about the fact that I have an ambition for making my job out of comedy, so earning money from that was really encouraging. Going back to the teaching, it's validating to be asked to teach, because "you know this well enough to pass it on to someone else". Which is something I still wonder about from time to time, it's like "why on earth did they let me teach, why on earth do they still let me teach". That's more imposter syndrome and anything else.

Richard Minkley 18:59

Do you remember what you taught? Or the general structure of the course?

Ben Macpherson 19:06

So, first principles. The skills we talked about earlier, And character creation, and to a certain extent game as well, which is something that is dropped out of the Missimp syllabus at the moment. or at least we've put a mask over it because the word game gets people confused and angry and excited.

Richard Minkley 19:29

Wow. Do you wanna give us a quick introduction to what you think game is?

Ben Macpherson 19:32

so, game is... There are hundred different schools that will tell you what game is but my understanding of it is, it is the pattern device or element of the scene, and I can see how vague that is, that elicit responses from your audience. Usually these are comedic games sometimes they are dramatic games sometimes they are tragic games. At that time we were focusing on teaching comedic games. And it is one of the odd things about improv which does tend to steer towards comedy because of the nature of the human spirit, that we tend not to actually teach the mechanics of comedy, when we do it. But we do teach people how to use patterns and how to set up patterns of behaviours to induce these incidents to happen again. And the theory of game in improv, and the teaching of it, is teaching people how to use and play with those patterns and there is jumping off points.

Richard Minkley 20:42

I'm interested in where you got the idea of game from, because I'm also interested in how that then feeds into the course. So you've gone from being someone interested, through drop-ins and things like that. Where are you getting your information about things like game from? Is it purely handed down to you?

Ben Macpherson 20:59

So, at that point there are a few of us that are going out to do external classes. So, a lot of the early Missimp syllabus was taken and adapted from UCB. And then we brought in other bits as different ones of us studied with different people, in much the same way that all improv courses and all improv knowledge is the weird genetic splicing of about six different people and exercises that you half remember and are renamed and added your own twist on.

Richard Minkley 21:37

You mean an oral history, by any chance?

Ben Macpherson 21:39

It's more like an oral syllabus.

Richard Minkley 21:42

Oh, that's a very interesting term.

Ben Macpherson 21:45

And the strange thing about the oral syllabus of improv in the UK is that it has this strange fusion of the ideas of Del Close and Chicago and San Francisco and then sort of you have this, like, extra thread of UCB game driven improv and then we have the strand of Johnstonian Characters status narrative driven improv, which is a lot more about the tilt and the change. And in that regard, it has more of the mechanics of a UCB driven course. But it is less. It has less steps to it, I think. And as these forms and styles develop, they get fused, merge, bastardized, hybridized until you sort of realized that For all the noise, it is still all pointing you to one thing, which is that you can make up good pieces of theatre.

Richard Minkley 23:19

I'm going to put a pin in this. Let's just quickly. Did you get them purely through with this the point where you, because I know a little bit about you, but I know that you have many books about improv.

Ben Macpherson 23:30

yes

Richard Minkley 23:30

and you used a lot of names there. Did you pick up these names and pick up this experience from external teachers or did you pick them up through that process of reading books as well?

Ben Macpherson 23:41

So my journey was mostly through external teaching. And then I use books as a foundation or as like a supplement to that foundation. They are they are scaffolding and ladders. they are not the house.

Richard Minkley 24:03

Interesting. So you're your first job you're teaching. Just how long does that go on for? I know that obviously six weeks courses.

Ben Macpherson 24:13

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 24:15

So I was gonna say what's the next chapter in?

Ben Macpherson 24:19

It is round about this point was we're still at The Corner that a young gentleman called Liam Weber comes into Missimp and starts doing things with us.

Richard Minkley 24:28

So is this Gen? Are we saying, I'm still doing an academic year? So it's 14/15?

Ben Macpherson 24:34

I would say, yeah, it's got a... it's I think it's 2015. Liam first comes to Missimp. And he goes on, he gets involved, and he'd done loads of comedy stuff through his time at university. And he wants to get involved, so he does. And he is the dynamo the that starts the renaissance of Missimp. He is singularly talented, driven and capable man, which is a devastating trio. Oh, God, I wish I was.

Richard Minkley 25:24

So okay. So, do you remember the first time you met Liam?

Ben Macpherson 25:31

No, I don't.

Richard Minkley 25:35

So it's interesting. You've described it as 2015, Liam comes in, is this at The Corner?

Ben Macpherson 25:40

This is at The Corner. And he gets involved and starts. He has a real drive about him. He's making... He's suggesting stuff, he's making stuff happen with a confidence that I hadn't realized, I could have had.

Richard Minkley 26:00

What do you mean?

Ben Macpherson 26:11

Not that there were sort of strict edicts and great bronze tablets determining "no, yes, maybe". But he came in and suddenly everything seemed possible.

Richard Minkley 26:30

Okay, so what did that [do]? We're still doing drop-ins. We're still doing gorilla burger. We've still got teams, like, your Fisticups, Fistycubs. Fisticuffs with unspeakable acts.

Ben Macpherson 26:42

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 26:43

When does things change?

Ben Macpherson 26:46

I would, I'd say the big change happens. Let's say 2017.

Ben Macpherson 26:58

So we're all learning different things and develop stories and understanding of improv and there's... The trouble is, there's never been any formal structure. There's never been an official document saying, This is who we are. These are what we do. So we start pulling those threads together. And there are different influences that have different voices. And I start... I've just realized I've missed something.

Richard Minkley 27:45

I, well, I was about to say we've jumped from 2015 . We're in The Corner.

Ben Macpherson 27:50

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 27:51

Did anything happen in 2016?

Ben Macpherson 27:53

Yeah, so. 2016 Yeah, I start... This is what I'd like to call the strife. And this is strife at the top. I don't know how much the community is aware of what happened at the top. But members who have been leading it, because there isn't a formal structure, because there isn't an accountability, we start getting elements of either jealousy or resentment or pettiness. I still don't know the right word for it. And we start seeing a fracturing [-] For one reason or another, I start developing things separate, to myself. So I start doing a two person improv show called Paria Exchange.

Richard Minkley 29:37

Paria exchange?

Ben Macpherson 29:38

P A R I A. Exchange.

Richard Minkley 29:42

That's interesting.

Ben Macpherson 29:45

And that's going well,

Richard Minkley 29:45

and this is to two-prov, which is improv with just two people.

Ben Macpherson 29:48

Yeah, that's right.

Richard Minkley 29:52

Who is that other person by the way.

Ben Macpherson 29:53

That is a guy called Gareth.

Richard Minkley 29:56

Do you remember his surname?

Ben Macpherson 29:57

Gareth Hughes

Richard Minkley 29:58

Hughes, hmmmn.

Ben Macpherson 30:05

Who you met this weekend?

Richard Minkley 30:07

Oh, was that the guy?

Ben Macpherson 30:08

That was Gareth, yeah.

Richard Minkley 30:08

Oh, fair enough. I was about to make an awful joke, but I'm not going to. So that's interesting because we've gone through strife at the top, to, "By the way, I've also got a two-prov". So do you consider yourself as part of that 'at the top of the community'?

Ben Macpherson 30:25

I need to think about what I'm saying here. So...

Richard Minkley 30:29

Would you like me to just shut up for a sec?

Ben Macpherson 30:31

A little bit?

Richard Minkley 30:31

Yeah, say what you need to say. For the record as well. There is the whole thing about having things reviewed and double checking, so don't panic.

Ben Macpherson 30:40

Yeah, I just wanted to double check on that. So, I have ambition, that Missimp is not meeting, as a personal drive. I start doing Paria Exchange and we turn that into something a little bit more... We start having... we talk about ideas of making a theatre company. as only 21/22 year olds can without any

real understanding, thought or practice. But also I chase my own ambition And it becomes unpleasant to the point where, I make up my mind in 20... after the last event of 2015, I pretty much make up my mind that I am not going to come back to Missimp.

Richard Minkley 32:06

At the end of 2015?

Ben Macpherson 32:07

Yeah. Because I... I'd... feeling picked on bullied for chasing what I want to do. Especially from this guy. I'd also made a couple of clanger mistakes, like, so, we'd started running some little teaching courses and workshops. And that had ruffled some feathers by people who thought that we were so similar to Missimp's syllabus.

Richard Minkley 32:44

So is the teaching that we've discussed so far part of Missimp or part of something extra?

Ben Macpherson 32:48

It has been part of Missimp.

Richard Minkley 32:50

And the teaching you've just described is something separate to that.

Ben Macpherson 32:53

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 32:53

I see.

Ben Macpherson 32:54

Because I still want to use this as my career and I can't see a problem in teaching my own stuff which there shouldn't be. Other people feel that I am teaching too much on the syllabus that I had had with Missimp. And I just taken it in done my own stuff with it. I still dispute whether I did that or not. I had thought I'd made it suitably different, whether that offense had happened. I... It does not bear thinking about. It will only... It does not move anything forward. It does not progress anything. I get fed up of the way I'm being treated. So I decided to remove myself from this situation. And I can remember saying goodbye to most of the people I cared about and improv, thinking, "Probably not going to see these people again for a while after New Year". That new year...

Richard Minkley 34:03

2015?

Ben Macpherson 34:04

Going into 2016. Gareth gets a PhD offer, so is leaving Nottingham. So I,[-] go back. So, I'd not made a massive deal of leaving, But I... Life changed. Fortunately the bridge had not been burnt or broken. So, Paria winds down pretty much overnight. And i go back to this environment that is, I'm now aware of is more toxic than [-] [I have been] prepared [-] [for.] This cycle of behaviour carries on [-] it becomes clear that there is not a tenable relationship going on here, and one person is causing the problem for all of it. So, [-] is asked to step down from [-] responsibilities as a community leader. We're

not throwing [-] out to the community. Very clear that you're welcome to come on to any Missimp events, but we feel that there is something compromising about how you're dealing with certain issues and certain people who [we] are supposed to be colleagues with. That results and in [-] leaving the community entirely. [-]

Richard Minkley 36:29

[-] Do you want to take a break or anything? Are you okay? If you want, we can give it a break and come back in a couple of minutes.

Ben Macpherson 36:41

Would that'd be alright?

Richard Minkley 32:52

Yeah, that's okay, do you wanna...

c) Part 3 of 3

28th January 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

work, community, felt, improv, Liam, rehearsals, theatre, ambition, company, talking, project, theatre, point, vastness, colleagues, people, events, interested, question, ben

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Ben Macpherson

Richard Minkley 00:00

Okay, so we're back for the second part, it's 12 minutes past 12 on the 28th of... Tuesday, the 28th of January 2020. Richard Minkley interviewing Ben McPherson. So we just talked about a period known as, that you refer to as the strife. that's kind of 2016. There's a couple of things I want to get out of there. You mentioned that the idea of wanting to become a theatre company. Do you want to introduce what that idea would have been.

Ben Macpherson 00:30

Are we talking about my personal goal or Missimp because I was talking about forming a theatre company as a personal project rather than as Missimp.

Richard Minkley 00:41

In the context, I think theatre companies is the traditional model for a performance group to go down.

Ben Macpherson 00:47

Yes.

Richard Minkley 00:49

What was... So was, was you thinking of. "was you thinking of", blrblrrblrr. Were you thinking of having a performance, a theatre company that was Missimp or was it more 'Ben and Gareth'.

Ben Macpherson 01:09

I had seen the model of US theaters And I was aspiring to be like that. And. It felt like things were going a touch too slowly with Missimp, and I felt that I couldn't voice my desire there. And so I went off and focused on my own project. And that's the time where we get more folks stepping up and doing more things.

Richard Minkley 01:50

What's interesting is that when you introduce that... so this is late 2016, early 2017 now or...

Ben Macpherson 01:57

Let's just call it 2016.

Richard Minkley 02:00
2016?

Ben Macpherson 02:01
It's pretty much. Yeah, Paria theatre existed as an idea for about a year.

Richard Minkley 02:06
So, and that's the point where you said, so, If at this point you're stepping away Is this the point where Liam is kind of taking on more stuff?

Ben Macpherson 02:14
Yes, but that makes it sound far more like Liam took my shoes than it actually was.

Richard Minkley 02:21
Well, let me ask this then what was your own project that you went on to?

Ben Macpherson 02:25
It was, it was Paria Theatre as it was. I wanted to make a company where I could use comedy and improv to make theatre. That's still an ambition I hold whether that is within Missimp or at a point where I said but I will part company at some point. That is life. You know, I. Whilst I love Missimp, I have no intention of dying doing it. But... I want... hmmm. my ambition is larger than the community that spawned it. And it is a personal ambition that I do not expect the community to follow me on. I can bring elements of what I eventually want my practice to have been into the community, but to expect a community to move in that direction with me, especially as one of the people who are responsible for it and do care for it. That is unreasonable and it is unfair.

Richard Minkley 03:54
This is, this is a very interesting thing. So, you're talking about what you want and how that led you, kind of away, from the community work that you were doing. What? What what was prior theatre, pariah theatre?

Ben Macpherson 04:09
Paria

Richard Minkley 04:10
Paria, sorry pariah...

Ben Macpherson 04:12
Thats okay,

Richard Minkley 04:12
That's a Freudian slip, if i've ever i heard one.

Ben Macpherson 04:14
No. no. Everyone made that mistake. I assumed more people could read Latin more accurately than I could. Then I, or as actively as I can.

Richard Minkley 04:22

How did pr... Pahria.

Ben Macpherson 04:25

Paria

Richard Minkley 04:25

Paria. I'm dyslexic, leave me the fuck alone.

Ben Macpherson 04:27

Thats okay. I'm not mocking you, i'm just...

Richard Minkley 04:30

So what was that like being... Because... I'm interested in the differences between doing a personal theatre work like that and that comedy experience... the community experience you'd had before. So what was it like going your own way?

Ben Macpherson 04:45

It was at first exciting.

Richard Minkley 04:50

I'm going to you know, I'm going to pause you because I can hear your clothes rustling on the mic. It's the I think it's tension in the wire a little bit. So yeah, to return to the question, what was it like going your own way?

Ben Macpherson 05:06

It was the first exciting. And then I realize the vastness of the work and the amount of work that the people who had already been committed doing things that we're doing. Even having a website that is regularly updated is a huge task. graphics, massive task. booking rehearsals and spaces massive task. getting people involved and doing things, massive task. And I left and came back to the far greater appreciation of the work my colleagues did, and what actually it meant to do the job of leading a group of people in the actual community.

Richard Minkley 05:59

I'm interested in that word vastness, what does... leaving the emotional context to that one side? What was the what is the vastness of being an independent performer.

Ben Macpherson 06:15

If you are... lets say, as a performer in Missimp, you can turn up to a few drop-ins, maybe a couple of rehearsals and do your show. the net commitment there, you're looking less than 10 hours. If you are part of the team who's, okay, you may be doing a bit of publicity work for it, so you're sharing it and it's only a couple of emails, add probably another eight hours or so on to that over the course of like, however long the wrap the show is. If you are also then providing the web content, adds some more hours on to that and suddenly the sheer weight of work spirals because not only do the people... myself and my colleagues make; one show a month but we're running four drop-ins, promoting them. We've got specialist events every other month or so. Shows two to three times a month. Individual team rehearsals that we're all committed to and helping run, we've got the marketing, we've got things like applying for insurances, we've got website updating to do, we've got this vast pool of work that is

divided between five people and we get to delegate some of it sometimes but sometimes we have to get involved and do it because we're the ones whose name are on the paper at the end of the day. And we've taken that responsibility on to look after this community. and. The work and the worry is something that you can't take account of if you're the person who turns up for just a couple of rehearsals and doesn't really have to do anything. And that's not said with resentment. That's a pleasure to do because we're helping people enjoy the thing we care about, but it is work. And even divided amongst five, it's a lot of work for all of us. And sometimes we go through phases where one person is pulling more than their fair share. And we see members of our team get burnt out and exhausted because they care so much about what we do. We care, there's no they about it. I'm as guilty of it as everyone else. And that balancing is something that is kind of hard to see.

Richard Minkley 09:12

what that... no, carry on carry on.

Ben Macpherson 09:14

All of this is before you are concerned about the quality of the show or the workshop or the drop-in or the class that you're teaching. So you have this extra set of worries that is, does this meet the, and I'm going to put this in inverted commas, "Missimp standard" get met making this. It's not that we are perfectionist, it's far far from that. But if we are putting work out in front of an audience, then, to serve our community, it needs to be of a certain level. Otherwise we find the opportunities for our community will shrink. People will be less interested in coming to see the shows, going to the classes, giving us grants to make other projects happen.

Richard Minkley 10:06

This is an interesting period because you've gone from talking about your improv experience to talking, you've been using words like company, ownership, colleagues. And it felt like there was a distinct lack of that between your experience from 2011 to 2014. Compared to your experience of 2015 to 2017.

Ben Macpherson 10:32

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 10:32

Is that... would you say that's an accurate description of your experience?

Ben Macpherson 10:36

I would say... I would say it is more 2017 to present, when we have seen that. When we start seeing when we... Missimp, it gets the point where it is doing really well, with the input of people like Liam, Like, like everyone, Nick...

Richard Minkley 10:59

Who's everyone?

Ben Macpherson 11:00

So the everyone... The Big Five everyone's are Nick, Liam, Marilyn, Emily and myself. And we start seeing more events happening, being produced at a higher standard we... it's a really small silly thing, but we start using a card reader. Like previously Missimp has been cash only and it now... we now have more of a digital financial presence. We have events that are doing well and becoming

successful and it's getting to the point where we can't classify ourselves as a community group anymore because with the rate we turn things out, we are doing the work of a company. So we have to register. So we register as a CIC, community interest company.

Richard Minkley 11:55

I'm going to put my finger on this point here because as well as running out of time for the particular Interview we're doing we are beginning to step outside the bounds of the project into... by which I mean we're in the present.

Ben Macpherson 12:06

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 12:06

Which is, maybe this is the nature of the beast. But I would like to round up where we are by asking... I want to kind of bring this down a little bit because we basically gone from 2011 when you were a student, and doing drop-ins to your now 2015, you were part... You said you felt that you were part of the top, 2016, you had a gap of absence, 2017, you come back a bit. There's two questions, and I was supposed to give you one of these, but you've kind of fit both of them.

Ben Macpherson 12:42

Have both.

Richard Minkley 12:43

Why did you leave? And why did you keep coming back? Now? I'm going to, just, before you answer those questions. Why did you keep coming back up until the point before you left? Why did you keep returning to do improv with Missimp?

Ben Macpherson 12:58

I was having fun with my friends.

Richard Minkley 13:04

Why did you, at that point where you decided to walk away, why did you leave?

Ben Macpherson 13:10

I felt I was getting tied into a position that I hadn't agreed to. I was feeling trapped and hurt and bullied. And I felt that Missimp and my ambition had reached a point where they weren't able to work together healthfully. And I was having too much expectation of Missimp and I wasn't as happy as I could have been. But then why did I come back?

Richard Minkley 14:01

Well, that's the that's the next question.

Ben Macpherson 14:02

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 14:02

You're doing my job for me now.

Ben Macpherson 14:03

I know.

Richard Minkley 14:04

Why did you come back?

Ben Macpherson 14:12

The opportunities were there. There was certain amount of "if this thing I had bet on, wasn't going ahead", which it wasn't, "then how do I work out what the next thing to do is?". And... the work needs doing. And I'm not saying I'm the only person who could do it. Far, far from it. There are hundreds of people who are more experienced and more transferable skills, but I had been doing it, i knew what work needed doing and I care about the people and the community that I look after, and I work for. I love that improv empowers people. I love the improv basically helped me deal with pretty much every mental health problem I've ever had. I love doing shows. I love seeing eight to 10 to 24 beautiful weirdos in a room, all pretending together and imagining and playing. And that is worth work worth working for. Work worth working for. And I miss my friends.

Richard Minkley 15:52

I mean, you've already answered this question pretty comprehensively but I will ask you as well. Why do you keep coming back even now?

Ben Macpherson 16:06

It brings me joy and it brings others joy.

Richard Minkley 16:11

is there anything else you want to say before we start recording?

Ben Macpherson 16:14

I sound like an asshole.

Richard Minkley 16:16

I'm afraid I just want to state for the record that he also looks like an asshole. So, no, I'm joking. No, you don't look like an asshole, but is there anything else we've got the setup that you want to add to what we've talked about.

Ben Macpherson 16:38

I have been a part of this machine and it has made a lot of good things. and i some times feel guilty for not doing more. But, I would do more if I had the confidence to do it to a standard I'd want. and I'm terrified of disappointing people who I care about. And there is a lot of fear in how I work for Missimp because I'm scared that it won't be there.

Richard Minkley 17:47

What won't be there?

Ben Macpherson 17:48

This community. Because it's important.

Richard Minkley 17:56

Well, thank you very much for your time, Ben. I'm going to stop that recording there.

8.2. Interview 2 of 2

a) Part 1 of 2

21st August 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, improv, vox pops, community, nottingham, exec, 20th anniversary, bit, happening, transient nature, formed, vox, feel, space, point, shows, organising, theatre, interesting, idea

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Ben MacPhearson

Richard Minkley 00:00

Okay, so we are recording you can see my little red light. It's 1135 on the 21st of August 2020. It's Richard Minkley interviewing Ben MacPhearson. For the second time round a

Ben MacPhearson 00:13

second time. yeah. Here we are.

Richard Minkley 00:14

Yes. And

Ben MacPhearson 00:16

how long has it been since we last had this conversation? Because

Richard Minkley 00:21

just for the record Missimp oral history project. Okay, go.

Ben MacPhearson 00:24

Sorry. Yes. Cutting off the flow at the beginning because we last spoke. I want to say it was either September or October last year. Was it December?

Richard Minkley 00:34

No, it wasn't last year was about it was late February, early March. Somewhere there.

Ben MacPhearson 00:38

Ah, fair enough. it feels longer?

Richard Minkley 00:40

Yeah. But that's because, again, an important thing for the record. The world ended while we were away. Yes, We are. Fortunately it didn't end completely but it did stop for a bit,

Ben MacPhearson 00:48

almost six months into a global pandemic.

Richard Minkley 00:51

Yeah. Which is an interesting part of the future. But we're not here for the future. We are here for the past.

Ben MacPhearson 00:58

What a horrifying thought? There is no future

Richard Minkley 01:02

there is only the past and it's repetitions.

Ben MacPhearson 01:05

We are corpses shambling with intent.

Richard Minkley 01:10

Well, ah, this when there's gonna be a bit in the podcast where I explain why it's difficult interviewing improvisers for history. And I'm going to play that clip, but I want to know we're coming back to the where we left off last time you were Paria was kind of coming to a close. You had an absence from Missimp. You're coming back again. So it's around 2016 2017. that that happened?

Ben MacPhearson 01:34

Yeah. Over pretty much over December. That year. So I

Richard Minkley 01:39

December 2016?

Ben MacPhearson 01:40

December 2016. Yeah. So 2016, I had sort of, I wasn't getting everything I wanted from Missimp. So I'd formed, I started off a two prov, and then had mad ideas about forming my own Theatre Company. And then Gareth, who was my partner in that act, said, Ah, I've got a PhD offer. I'm going to Norwich. And I had said, like, Hey, I'm probably not gonna be back after Christmas to a load of people. I remember sort of like, it was the last social of the year, like coming up to Christmas. And I sort of made sure to get one aside and said, Hey, I'm probably not gonna be back afterwards. And January, rolled around, and here I was the liar. But like, well my life is falling apart, So not my whole life. Enough of it has fallen apart that my plans have changed. And I am sort of back where I made a home for myself originally.

Richard Minkley 02:39

And that's about January,

Ben MacPhearson 02:41

that is January,

Richard Minkley 02:42

January, came back. Okay. So I'm going to start out with a bit of a broader question, and then bring it back in again, because one of the things that's very important in this part of the interview is understanding when and how Missimp worked as a community of people, obviously. So at that point, let's say 2016, before you left away, did Missimp feel? No, once they explicitly recognised I'm going to say this question a bit more precisely,

Ben MacPhearson 03:15

please do

Richard Minkley 03:15

2016.

Ben MacPhearson 03:16

Yes.

Richard Minkley 03:17

Did Missimp recognise itself explicitly as a community? Like was that idea that or was it just a bunch of people and they didn't really think about?

Ben MacPhearson 03:30

It was not an explicit idea. At that point, at least not to my knowledge. I think we will still, this is still just before we start sort of properly, having either the third or fourth kind of wave of expansion. I would say, I think last time I spoke about the idea that originally it was some mates getting together in a front room,

Richard Minkley 03:58

yeah,

Ben MacPhearson 03:58

off the back of the course. And then it was some mates getting together in a space. And then it was, oh, we have, we have got our mates come along. But then we've also got sort of people who are new to us, and we're starting to grow. And that was when I joined. And then I think 2016 2017 is when we start to see this this change into Actually, we are a sort of a regular group. It was when we started having more fixed shows that we were not just answerable to ourselves for and

Richard Minkley 04:38

Okay

Ben MacPhearson 04:38

we start seeing sort of faces who do not have some prior connection to Missimp coming along. That's really 2017 I would say that sort of fires off.

Richard Minkley 04:52

That's interesting. So what would you have described it with. I'm going to pick you up on a couple of things You said that were interesting, but before we do, would you have described That group before the 2016 2017 sort of adventure you had, would it have still looking back? Would you said yeah, it was a community, but we didn't know it? Or was it still something else?

Ben MacPhearson 05:15

I would say at that stage, it was it was more like a large group of friends. I think there was less of the, to me a community is lots of small groups coming together.

Richard Minkley 05:35

Okay,

Ben MacPhearson 05:36

at least in terms of what the Missimp community is, to me, you know, we've got people who come to drop-ins, particularly teams, that sort of thing. At that point, in my mind, the community is much closer to sort of a larger group of friends.

Richard Minkley 05:57

Yeah. Okay. Because an interesting thing you said there is that you were only answerable to you? We were not answerable to anyone but ourselves. What? Do you want to describe that a little bit more for me? Like, what does that mean?

Ben MacPhearson 06:14

So Missimp running, right, when Missimp ran shows. We did it as Missimp we got a space. We advertised it. We weren't in like an official programme. So we weren't at that stage in connection with the Playhouse to the best of my recollection. Yeah, 20. We might have done the first Playhouse show. No, we can't have done. No. So we didn't have we weren't sort of booking spaces and get us in other people's programmes. It was we want to put on a show we're putting on a show.

Richard Minkley 06:57

Okay.

Ben MacPhearson 06:58

And I sort of almost discount the relationship there with Glee Club because whilst we were in a professional space, we we weren't. We never felt like we were really at the core of what they wanted to do. Whereas something like our relationship Playhouse or with Nonesuch studios, we are booked in the programme, we're on their website, we get proper support. We didn't really have that with Glee, we sort of had the space we rocked up. We did the show we left.

Richard Minkley 07:32

Okay. That's very interesting. Okay, so you come back in 2017. I'm trying to get a sense of what the what Missimp was back then. What the What were the shape of it? What what was happening? So what what improv was happening for Missimp, early 2017.

Ben MacPhearson 07:53

So early 2017. There is the weekly drop in.

Richard Minkley 08:00

Yeah,

Ben MacPhearson 08:01

so every Thursday for a couple of hours, everyone would get together. Once a month, there was the gorilla burger show, which. beg your pardon, I've yawned. it was the gorilla burger show, which was the same as it is now basically, sort of put your name in the hat if you feel like Yeah,

Richard Minkley 08:18

yeah,

Ben MacPhearson 08:19

karaoke, feel kinda to do it. Then that was the point where rhymes against humanity had sort of started, I think they were, they'd been there for about eight months to a year, sort of they were in there was still quite early stages,

Richard Minkley 08:38

but they'd have established themselves as existing, I suppose.

Ben MacPhearson 08:41

Yeah, exactly. And there was small little projects that sort of popped up and sort of went away in in their own space. So I think the first iteration of the Star Wars Show millions of voices was going at that point. Yeah, that sounds about right. And then they have the usual sort of selection of things like consenting partners from time to time and that sort of thing.

Richard Minkley 09:12

So is this consenting? I'm not sure if I've had someone explain what consenting partners is. I'm going to ask you. what what was consenting partners?

Ben MacPhearson 09:22

So consenting partners was the name for the improv duo's show that Missimp runs. We are changing the name for that to be sort of more sensitive to the, you know,

Richard Minkley 09:41

sexual nature of consenting partners?

Ben MacPhearson 09:43

Yeah, the sexual nature of consenting partners. That's right,

Richard Minkley 09:46

just realised that that's there as well.

Ben MacPhearson 09:48

Oh, yeah. Like, I don't think I think it's okay, so we're getting out in front of the the horse, the cart. we're putting the horse and the cart behind us. We are Ahead of the horse, we have put ourselves before the horse and the cart.

Richard Minkley 10:03

So this is very important though. So you are dragging both the horse and the cart,

Ben MacPhearson 10:08

I currently have a horse and cart tied to me in that order, the horse is facing the other way and pulling against me. And that is tied exactly into the renaming of shows be more sensitive to the audience.

Richard Minkley 10:21

Fair enough. That's interesting. So we got millions of voices consenting partners, I'm interested, what were these other little extra shows that you would do. [...]

Ben MacPhearson 10:31

they were sort of little pop up things really the show that would become. So the show that we had had at The Glee Club, Missimp in action sort of changed, and fizzled became like a stock thing we had in the back pocket. So we, we knew we could trot out a short form show if we needed it. And sort of in 2017 2018, we would have Missimp action, which was the sort of the new, the young blood show, if you like it. And that'd be where we'd sort of look at promoting new performers, new talent, that kind of thing. And that was sort of in the back pocket at that time.

Richard Minkley 11:27

Okay, so was that? Because I'm thinking Missimp in action sounds a lot like Missimp on fire. So was Missimp on fire a little bit.

Ben MacPhearson 11:34

That's it. I'd entirely forgot the name of the show. So Missimp on fire, where we promote new talent. Entirely forgotten what the shows are called.

Richard Minkley 11:43

This is. This is the bit the bit you're like, get rid of that.

Ben MacPhearson 11:45

Yeah, no, no, I'm blaming this entirely on the fact that I've not been at a live improv show in half a year

Richard Minkley 11:53

Yeah

Ben MacPhearson 11:53

basically.

Richard Minkley 11:54

Yeah, it's been tough. Okay, so there's quite a lot of things going on there in 2016. So let's how so there's a moment here where I'm kind of anticipating, which is making me think a lot about like setting the stage for it. So like, because at a certain point, the exec is formed, and which, you know, it's given a name, and recognised as existing. What was the situation? You came back in 20, Let's say around 2016 2017. There was it? Was there an exec or was that just a sense of some people are in charge, or

Ben MacPhearson 12:37

there was a sense of some people were in charge. And those people who are in charge were the ones to just go and get stuff done. And that is somewhat how it remained up until we put all that is how it remained until we formed a company.

Richard Minkley 12:56

It's interesting,

Ben MacPhearson 12:57

because at the end of the day, whether you got any fancy title or whatever, the work just needs to do it.

Richard Minkley 13:07

That's very interesting. So let's say 2016. Who were the people who got stuff done. So that is,

Ben MacPhearson 13:17

Nick.

Richard Minkley 13:19

Nick Tyler?

Ben MacPhearson 13:20

Nick Tyler, Lloydie.

Richard Minkley 13:23

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 13:24

And Nick Parkhouse were sort of the they were like the big three.

Richard Minkley 13:27

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 13:29

And then to a lesser extent, there was Liam, and Marilyn, and sort of myself dropping in and out. And it wasn't sort of, because I was focused on this other project. And as that wound down, I got more involved in organising stuff here, because I'm a person who tries to get stuff done,

Richard Minkley 13:53

get stuff done. That's very interesting. Okay, so we're here at the minute its 2016. When does that begin? Because this whole period is, is in flux. There's things changing all the time. When does that world that you came back to in 2017 begin to shift was something introduced or did people make decisions on anything?

Ben MacPhearson 14:21

So the big question that we kept coming back to round about that sort of time, and for three or four months at the start of 2017, I was I perceive I was a bit sort of distrusted, because I've gone off to do my own thing. In trying to set up my own syllabus, I'd put a couple people's noses out of joint. They felt that I'd taken the Missimp syllabus, which hadn't been my intention, but if it was, that's how they perceived it.

Richard Minkley 14:56

And that was that was back in 2016, before you

Ben MacPhearson 14:58

that was doing stuff with Paria Yeah. But the question that always came to bear was, wouldn't it be nice if we got our own space?

Richard Minkley 15:07

Right

Ben MacPhearson 15:10

And as that question was considered more seriously, we had to move towards getting a more formal structure, because you can't sign leases and that kind of thing without having a sort of proper structure and a setup.

Richard Minkley 15:29

Right. That's interesting. So it said you kept coming back to, wouldn't it be nice to have our own space? Is there because then there's a kind of like a dream in that almost

Ben MacPhearson 15:45

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 15:45

of having your own space. And I can imagine that dream existed, probably on and off for the whole thing, and even a little bit before.

Ben MacPhearson 15:53

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 15:53

like people were imagining having their own setup and their own thing. When did that begin to stop being come down from the dream? I don't know why I'm waving my arms about to do this, but descend from the dream and just not becoming something that people were actually considering.

Ben MacPhearson 16:09

I would say mid to late 2017. Going into 2018 was when we were sort of most actively looking for spaces.

Richard Minkley 16:23

Oh, man, there's so many questions around that. Oh, man. Let's Let's begin with. I'm going to ask this as if it's a very formal structure, like you had a had a dah dah dah, dah, dah. But what were you looking for in space?

Ben MacPhearson 16:39

Basically, two to three rooms. Preferably licensed,

Richard Minkley 16:49

licensed, meaning

Ben MacPhearson 16:50

we could serve booze,

Richard Minkley 16:51

booze

Ben MacPhearson 16:53

with enough room to perform and do workshops in. And sort of that time we were looking for other features, like sort of accessibility or more of a, a nice afterthought than a priority that's changed and how we look for spaces like now, you know, we have mobility issue members of the community. So we now make, it's now sort of is as accessible is kind of like the first question we ask about space.

Richard Minkley 17:33

So

Ben MacPhearson 17:34

which is still really hard to find?

Richard Minkley 17:36

Yeah. But, so you weren't really thinking about the accessibility? So in terms of stairs and stuff, when you say, two to three rooms? Is it? Because a room could mean a lot of things like we've talked about the infamous Blue Room? Just a room with more blue than it had any right to have?

Ben MacPhearson 17:58

Yes. Nightmarish.

Richard Minkley 18:00

Hmm. But how big is a? How big is a? How big were you guys looking for in terms of an improv room?

Ben MacPhearson 18:06

We were looking for a theatre space, which we could use for workshops, a sort of foyer bar space, and an office slash Green Room. Basically, if we get those three, we could structure a show pretty easily around it. And I mean, it's, there's still something quite nice about that idea of bijoux little space. That's just like, yeah, it's got everything we need.

Richard Minkley 18:37

got everything we need,

Ben MacPhearson 18:38

we pay less than 800 pounds a month.

Richard Minkley 18:41

That was that

Ben MacPhearson 18:42

no, no,

Richard Minkley 18:43

was that, was there

Ben MacPhearson 18:44

that wasn't the figure that was me just pulling a number out of my head?

Richard Minkley 18:47

Was there a figure that you were like, this is what we can afford?

Ben MacPhearson 18:50

no.

Richard Minkley 18:50

I'm going to preface this question by saying, asking questions about money. I am going to ask, you can tell me, I can't talk about that.

Ben MacPhearson 18:59

I can't talk about it, because I'm not aware of what the finance situation was at that time.

Richard Minkley 19:03

I see. It's interesting. So you this formal. Oh, man. Yeah, that was it. So where did you look? Where did you consider

Ben MacPhearson 19:14

so there was mostly city centre. You know, it's the transport hub. If you're going to get people coming for a night out and more loads come to the city centre, say Arnold, or, you know, Beeston or Basford or any other part of the city?

Richard Minkley 19:34

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 19:35

Everyone goes into Nottingham, you don't go out of Nottingham for a night out?

Richard Minkley 19:39

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 19:41

So that was where we were mostly looking.

Richard Minkley 19:44

But like as in Were there any individual spaces that you considered and

Ben MacPhearson 19:48

I can't remember any actively It was a case of if corporate stuff. If corporate spaces came up, we looked at it. So we saw a lot of office spaces. Yeah, I think without realising it, we were looking at stuff that they were doing in. Similarly in London like theatre delicatessen or the nursery, who took over sort of cheap office spaces when they were empty, and sort of, you know, squatted on a lease, basically until a "proper company". And that was sarcastic. There was the air quotes with air quotes around that until sort of, you know, established traditional setup company would take over the office space. And I

think we kind of had a bit of that approach. Not that we intend to be booted out anytime soon. But yeah,

Richard Minkley 20:40

so the search for space was the thing that started you on the formal structure. So there's two things we need to talk about there. What the shape that that formal structure began to take and eventually ended up at. But also the effect of those changes. So let's start off with was there a moment where you said, Let's get someone said, Let's get a space. Let's start doing this. Let's start moving towards this structure.

Ben MacPhearson 21:09

It was always the Just the conversation in pubs conversation

Richard Minkley 21:12

conversation in pubs

Ben MacPhearson 21:13

There was no, there was no Sit down. Now we are going to discuss space acquisition. [yawn] I'm sorry. I'm tired?

Richard Minkley 21:21

That's all right.

Ben MacPhearson 21:21

Yeah, there's no point we sort of sat down and said, right, we're going to have the meeting without getting the space. It was just the topic that kept coming up in pubs, that kind of thing when we're sitting down after jams after drop-ins.

Richard Minkley 21:33

But at a certain point, someone must have gone. Let's go and look at this space. Let's go and do this.

Ben MacPhearson 21:39

Yep, I can't remember.

Richard Minkley 21:41

Okay,

Ben MacPhearson 21:41

when.

Richard Minkley 21:42

Fair enough. So that's interesting. So if everything's being organised, sort of in conversations in the pub afterwards, what kind of, I suppose that is the kind of format that we've already got, like they were generally conversations in pubs set up Missimp, as it was then with the kind of little summary of the drop-ins, the gorilla burgers, and then other people organising their own little projects, and

Ben MacPhearson 22:08

yeah,

Richard Minkley 22:09

smaller shows around it. So what was the next step that happened in terms of that structure forming?

Ben MacPhearson 22:19

So there was talking in 2017, about becoming sort of a more of an established committee,

Richard Minkley 22:31

okay,

Ben MacPhearson 22:32

or an executive, if you want to call it. And there was a case that Nick Tyler, Lloydie and Nick Parkhouse were sort of the ones who were the organisers basically, like they were the big three

Richard Minkley 22:57

yeah

Ben MacPhearson 22:57

little triumvirate of organisers, and everyone else sort of did things peripherally. And it got to the point where there was conflict and tension between a couple of people in the community and one of the members of the team there, and moved to a point where that person was asked to step down. And we needed more people to organise stuff. So the people who had sort of been doing the like, I'm gonna put them in brackets, lieutenants sort of just stepped up to be the next people who organise stuff.

Richard Minkley 23:43

Who were the lieutenants was that?

Ben MacPhearson 23:45

That was people like, Liam, myself. I can't remember Emily was back at that point.

Richard Minkley 23:54

Possibly, Emily.

Ben MacPhearson 23:55

Emily, I think Emily came back in. Emily had started her masters in late 2016. Yes, that makes sense. So she had started to come back. She wasn't doing as much organising that points. You're still fairly early back to us, but sort of, should have been starting to come along to things then. And I say that like there was sort of formal roles. Like I know Liams specially was doing a heck of a lot. And in a couple instances, had been kinda treated like a junior partner, at least as I perceived it, which was part of the tension that led to that that sort of trio going down to two. And we stepped up and did what needed to do to keep things going and eventually grow.

Richard Minkley 24:48

So was there any other people in that group of lieutenants? There was Liam, you said Liam, Ben Emily,

Ben MacPhearson 24:53

Marilyn, and there was also Diane Parkhouse. is Nick Parkhouse' partner.

Richard Minkley 25:02

Yeah. Okay. Okay, so you've described this kind of triumvirate and lieutenants then kind of You didn't say

Ben MacPhearson 25:14

I tend to. So I will clarify for myself with. I tend to think of things in like historical metaphors.

Richard Minkley 25:21

Yeah, this is probably

Ben MacPhearson 25:22

[I'm keeping to] a Roman sort of model in my head.

Richard Minkley 25:25

This is probably a good point to mention again that you studied classics.

Ben MacPhearson 25:29

Yes.

Richard Minkley 25:30

And it makes sense.

Ben MacPhearson 25:31

Everything can be modeled on an ancient Roman world.

Richard Minkley 25:35

Well, we were joking, but I think it was at the beginning. Like, what do we say something like there is no future only history and it's repetition?

Ben MacPhearson 25:41

Yes, we are

Richard Minkley 25:42

There is only antiquity and its.

Ben MacPhearson 25:43

We're all corpses, shambling with intent.

Richard Minkley 25:47

Oh my god, I really hope I can name an episode that. okay, but then so you you.

Ben MacPhearson 25:53

Oh god, I'm gonna be kicked off the exec. (laughs).

Richard Minkley 25:54

Yeah, this is. This is the end for you. no,

Ben MacPhearson 25:58

Oh, wow.

Richard Minkley 25:59

Okay, well,

Ben MacPhearson 26:00

at least I've got my solo career.

Richard Minkley 26:02

you're. Okay, so we're in a situation where a tension happened. And some people stepped away. Some people stepped up. How did that new because it's still you haven't called them then we became the exec. So what was this shape? And how did that affect what was happening broader.

Ben MacPhearson 26:25

So the idea and exec discussed late 2017. And made, laid out properly in early 2018. If I remember correctly, because we wanted to have a sort of chat about Missimp is 20 years old, and 2018. So we want to say, this is what is coming up. And

Richard Minkley 26:50

this is what's coming up.

Ben MacPhearson 26:52

So this is what we're doing for our 20th birthday.

Richard Minkley 26:55

Okay.

Ben MacPhearson 26:55

And this is we're going to look at forming it into a more formalised structure. This is the current plan we have.

Richard Minkley 27:04

That's very interesting. So that's the converse. You have that conversation of this is the plan for the 20th anniversary. In fact, yeah. Do you remember the first time it was set mentioned that Missimp was going to be 20?

Ben MacPhearson 27:17

Oh, I think Nick, Nick just dropped it as a piece of trivia. One night in the pub, I think. Which is quite cool. Just Oh, yeah. This is happening. Oh, is it? Great?

Richard Minkley 27:36

When did that become, Let's do a thing?

Ben MacPhearson 27:38

Very shortly afterwards.

Richard Minkley 27:39

Okay.

Ben MacPhearson 27:40

Missimp is 20 Next year. we should have a 20th birthday party is basically that.

Richard Minkley 27:44

Yeah,

Ben MacPhearson 27:45

turnaround?

Richard Minkley 27:47

So what were the things you said, Okay, this is the plan. Now? How? Yeah, what was I feel like the obvious question, what was the plan?

Ben MacPhearson 27:57

for the 20th? Or for?

Richard Minkley 28:01

I don't know, because you kind of

Ben MacPhearson 28:02

forming a company?

Richard Minkley 28:02

You said when you said this is the plan. You said it in? It felt like a broader sense than just the anniversary itself?

Ben MacPhearson 28:08

Yeah. So we sort of wanted, we wanted to do all this to coincide with the 20th anniversary, like we're 20. This is how we're going to be running Missimp going forwards, which is setting up a more formal company. Partly, mostly because we had too much money in the bank account at that point, and needed to start doing things like declaring tax on it. Because we don't want to break the law. And I'd like that down twice, please.

Richard Minkley 28:41

They really, I would just like to say if this has been played in court, they really didn't want to break the law.

Ben MacPhearson 28:46

We really don't want to break the law. And yes, so we moved on from being this sort of club. that earnt bit of money to sort of actually we are a bit of a force creatively in Nottingham. So by 2017, the Vox pops were formed.

Richard Minkley 29:14

Hmm.

Ben MacPhearson 29:15

And I want to say late 2017, the vortex also formed, or early 2018. The vortex formed, I want to say late 2017.

Richard Minkley 29:25

Okay.

Ben MacPhearson 29:26

So we're starting to get more house teams, more shows are going on. We're building partnerships with new venues. And it's ballooning.

Richard Minkley 29:35

Right. So that growth, the vox pops, the vortex, shows teams, lots of things happening with that kind of before, after or around this decision to have a plan

Ben MacPhearson 29:45

it was all sort of tied into it really early. It's a plan that keeps changing and evolving and we like it one day and hate it the next day. That's how any idea works. So

Richard Minkley 30:00

No I carry on.

Ben MacPhearson 30:02

But as we sort of, from being a thing that pootles along and occasionally does a show, we were suddenly actually we are a lot more of a player here than we give ourselves credit for. You know, we are putting on one of the most regular comedy programmers in the city. We offer training, we're building people up, we're getting new shows developed all the time. People having an idea as we were a growing community, and we wanted to do more.

Richard Minkley 30:34

How did that period feel?

Ben MacPhearson 30:41

I felt very excited. I, I am not. I'm a person who loves the ideas when it comes to this stuff, but I'm not the person who has them. So as a person, on the exec, I think I am more of a turn upon the night and get the work that needs to be done kind of a person as opposed to a big plan, big thinker, type Player. at least at that stage. Certainly, I think I'm probably a bit more big picture now. lessons learned in, you know, being in one of the organisation roles, you learn that you're going to always be looking forward and organising. But yeah getting that stuff sorted. And having those feeds feeding in started to shape us like, we now had teams who want to perform to form there was. So yeah, I want to say March 2017, the first smash night

Richard Minkley 31:49

2017 or 2018? Sorry.

Ben MacPhearson 31:51

2017, I think,

Richard Minkley 31:52

okay, we can check this out.

Ben MacPhearson 31:53

Yeah. Which was the brainchild of Liam wanted to sort of create an experimental place. So we're starting to see more opportunities to bring more people in. We've got more events going on, things are running and growing and building. And it's sort of inevitable that we need to start thinking about how does this all tie together? And what does it tie together under?

Richard Minkley 32:22

That's very interesting. oh, theres a lot to chew over there? So you've described all that as exciting.

Ben MacPhearson 32:29

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 32:33

It feels my instant reaction is it kind of feels a little bit simple to just say all of this is exciting. Like there's huge amount of stuff going on there. How long did the exec, How? I tell you what, we'll talk about it as we go. So I'm going to put down this idea of the exec for a little bit.

Ben MacPhearson 32:55

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 32:55

And then pick up some of these other little tasty morsels that you've left around for me.

Ben MacPhearson 32:59

sure

Richard Minkley 32:59

First off, most importantly, at what point, what was your first memory of the vortex? The Vox pops [fucking hell] The Vox Pops?

Ben MacPhearson 33:10

Yeah. So I, the Vox pops was born out of an idea I'd wanted to do with Paria I was thinking like, okay, here's a really great first project, we'll get a team going doing the Armando format. And when that fell apart I was like, well, I really like this idea. I still want to do it. Is Missimp open to it? cool off I go. And I want to say it was February 2017. that I formed or held the auditions for Vox Pops.

Richard Minkley 33:46

we'll be able to find out more precisely somewhere. However, you said that you you asked if Missimp was open to it. What does asking Missimp if it was open to it I mean? did you go to a specific person? Or was it just like a sense of the community

Ben MacPhearson 33:59

I had stepped away to do the same thing. I mentioned I'd put a few people's noses out of joint in doing that. I didn't know if I was going to be received warmly off the back of it. And I was, so It went ahead.

Richard Minkley 34:14

So you asked the did you ask the triumvirate or did you check with the the lieutenant's?

Ben MacPhearson 34:20

They

Richard Minkley 34:20

Is this a rebellion?

Ben MacPhearson 34:21

They'd really hate to be called that I'm sure. Excellent. I just sort of it's never a sort of begging grovelling process or anything like that there's you don't have to submit a form or anything like that. It's like, hey, I want to do this idea on a form this team experimenting with this? And they're like, cool. And I felt it was important to sort of checking that was still All right, cuz I didn't know if the bridges was still there. They were.

Richard Minkley 34:54

That's interesting. So I suppose this is where we can really sink our teeth in a little bit. More into what the Vox pops is.

Ben MacPhearson 35:03

Yeah. Vox pops.

Richard Minkley 35:05

What is the vox pops?

Ben MacPhearson 35:06

Well, Richard, you're part of a team.

Richard Minkley 35:08

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 35:08

You've been there for two years, you ought to bloody know by now. So it's a Missimp formed team that Do the Armando format, telling true stories into sketches, scenes and sort of characters and bits?

Richard Minkley 35:24

Okay. I feel like we could talk about how the Vox pops shows work for far too long and people would be very

Ben MacPhearson 35:31

I run so many rehearsals on this.

Richard Minkley 35:33

Yeah, where I've completely disrupted it being like, Well, why is this actually about? Let's not go down that road.

Ben MacPhearson 35:38

Yeah, Please. Give me a hernia.

Richard Minkley 35:41

One, okay, but who was the first lineup who started when the Vox pops, you had the audition? who became the Vox pops? So I I'm gonna pause,

Ben MacPhearson 35:55

Do you wanna. Okay. I do want me to pause the recording.

Richard Minkley 35:58

Yeah. Let's pause the recording.

Ben MacPhearson 35:59

We will be back.

b) Part 2 of 3

21st August 2020

Richard Minkley 36:00

Okay, we're back. Just for Richard. This is the second part of the first part of the second interview with Ben MacPhearson. I'm Richard Minkley. It is 1215 on the

Ben MacPhearson 36:15

It also says it on the phone

Richard Minkley 36:17

21st of the August 2020. right.

Ben MacPhearson 36:23

So

Richard Minkley 36:23

so we were talking about the Vox pops. So who was in that initial lineup,

Ben MacPhearson 36:28

so I'm gonna have to throw my mind back now. The initial lineup of Vox pops were myself. Lee

Richard Minkley 36:39

Kennedy?

Ben MacPhearson 36:40

Lee Kennedy, Mitchel Masterson, John Hardy. And then Julie Hansen. Katie Mitchell. Was Bonnie and at that point, no, no Bonnie came in and left sort of on our own. And, oh, why can't I remember Lucy? Lucy's name?

Richard Minkley 37:04

Why can't you remember Lucy's name?

Ben MacPhearson 37:05

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 37:05

Was it Lucy by any chance?

Ben MacPhearson 37:06

It was Lucy.

Richard Minkley 37:07

So Theres a Lucy

Ben MacPhearson 37:08

and I entirely forgotten Lucy surname, I'm gonna Lucy Hallam.

Richard Minkley 37:12

Lucy Hallam,

Ben MacPhearson 37:13

Lucy Hallam,

Richard Minkley 37:14

who was, whats Bonnies surname.

Ben MacPhearson 37:19

One moment. Give me a second. Dear listeners I am currently checking Facebook

Richard Minkley 37:26

was in fact while you're checking was Sam later part of the group at this point?

Ben MacPhearson 37:30

No.

Richard Minkley 37:30

Okay.

Ben MacPhearson 37:31

Not at that point. He he sort of came to us a bit later, and I liked what he's doing. So I asked if he fancied coming along.

Richard Minkley 37:38

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 37:39

What was Bonnie's surname. She's now Bonnie Cliff married to Pete cliff, who was a member of rhymes for a while. I can't remember her surname. Thats so bad.

Richard Minkley 37:52

Pete cliff, who people will remember as "Anneka Rice"

Ben MacPhearson 37:55

yes.

Richard Minkley 37:57

No, no, no, don't explain it. Don't explain it I love it, that no one's gonna understand it. So Bonnie cliff. Lucy Hallam. Okay. And then, um, so yeah. Do you remember your first vox pops show?

Ben MacPhearson 38:14

We did a little bit at the end of a gorilla burger. We did sort of a 15-20 minutes set at the end of a gorilla burger. I was terrified. As I always am putting new work out in the world. But no, they did really, really well.

Richard Minkley 38:30

That's fascinating. So there's lots of people chopping and changing and things of

Ben MacPhearson 38:38

yeah

Richard Minkley 38:38

t's not the same lineup now.

Ben MacPhearson 38:39

No

Richard Minkley 38:40

but I think one of the things I'm interested on while we've got chance is is the distinction between what it feels like to the Vox pops and what it feels like to be a member of the Missimp exec?

Ben MacPhearson 38:53

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 38:54

How would you describe those two different projects for you.

Ben MacPhearson 39:00

So being part of the Missimp exec, is you are somewhat of a caretaker. You make sure that you know, the shows going on that people are doing all right. And you do that as best you can. Being part of the Vox pops, I am the director. So I get to determine, you know, what the show is structured? Like, what we're going to focus on what areas we're going to try to highlight. At the end of the day, I have a lot more creative responsibility in the vox box, whereas in the executive is more of a sort of administrative responsibility.

Richard Minkley 39:49

Hmm. So that's interesting. Did you realise that when you started did it did you because you've described what it feels like To do the two different things. Did you understand that when you started them? Or is that something that you had to learn?

Ben MacPhearson 40:07

I had an idea of them when I started them, but the nature of it, and the way you go about it is something you learn with it. You know, you make mistakes, you do the best thing you can in any situation. And sometimes it goes, Well, sometimes it doesn't.

Richard Minkley 40:22

So the vox pops in October 2018, which was the 20th anniversary and beyond is different to what it was, then we'll come back and check up on the vox pops when we move further on things shift about.

But what so what came first, this feeling of Ben as a member of the exec, or this kind of grouping Who would get stuff done? Did that come before the Vox pops? or after? Or were they kind of simultaneous?

Ben MacPhearson 40:54

They took different times. I think it is almost like the difference between a satellite map and a Ordnance Survey map there might be depicting the same things, but the routes you're seeing are very different. They deal with the same terrain, but it's hard to relate one to the other.

Richard Minkley 41:15

Okay,

Ben MacPhearson 41:15

so vox pops was a creative project I wanted to do. No one else was gonna do that creative project, because it was the creative project that was in my brain. So I went and did it.

Richard Minkley 41:25

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 41:25

And I wanted to do it with Missimp, then being part of the exec was something that sort of needed to be done for the thing that I cared most about, which was the keeping Missimp going.

Richard Minkley 41:40

Okay. So this is 2017. That's your experience setting up the Vox pops.

Ben MacPhearson 41:49

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 41:51

But it's interesting that this is happening in a broader context as well, because you kind of rattled off, there was smash night, there was the vortex. There was more more shows. I'm assuming that more of these smaller shows like, because I pretty sure I took part in some of the things like Missimp on fire and consenting partners.

Ben MacPhearson 42:09

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 42:11

Those things were also increasing. So what was it like? Because it's difficult because I asked you about the vortex, but it's not really your story. But what was it like setting up and operating in this growth as particularly just as an improviser? In a creative type of person that you are?

Ben MacPhearson 42:32

It's really encouraging.

Richard Minkley 42:33

Yeah?

Ben MacPhearson 42:35

absolutely. There's its one of the lovely things about improv that you're never really in competition. Whereas something like theatre, you're auditioning for a role. You You're trying to get it. You're trying to sell your show. You want to do this or like stand up where it's okay, I've got to get on this bill. I've got to get these laughs I've got to get ahead with this in improv, it. It sounds naive, but that is not the same level of burnout and bloodlust

Richard Minkley 43:15

bloodlust?

Ben MacPhearson 43:16

to be dramatic.

Richard Minkley 43:17

No, that's a very interesting way to describe it.

Ben MacPhearson 43:19

I think

Richard Minkley 43:20

what is theatrical bloodlust?

Ben MacPhearson 43:22

I think theatrical bloodlust is you know, you want to obviously you want to always create the best work you can. you want to do this you want, there are no award shows in improv. You're never going to be best supporting improviser and you're never going to be you're never gonna have Best Original Score of an improvised musical, you know,

Richard Minkley 43:45

yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 43:47

Because of the transient nature of the work that we make, it is a lot more forgiving, a lot more freeing and a lot more vital to the arts vital in the sense that it is it is life giving.

Richard Minkley 44:08

It gives you vitality?

Ben MacPhearson 44:09

yes. And revitalising

Richard Minkley 44:11

So, you said that the transient nature of the art or the craft or

Ben MacPhearson 44:17

The work

Richard Minkley 44:18

the work, what is the transient nature of the work,

Ben MacPhearson 44:22

I am going to get onstage and aggressively imagine for you for the next 15 minutes to an hour, however long The show is. when that is done, the work is gone. It has moved on. However, if you liked seeing that process, you can come and watch me again next month where I will again aggressively imagine something for you with my friends

Richard Minkley 44:48

thats

Ben MacPhearson 44:48

for your delight. So its

Richard Minkley 44:52

I was going to say the disposable nature of it, but they that would suggest that you've made something and then chosen to throw it away.

Ben MacPhearson 44:59

Yes. I guess there is there is no conscious choice in the throwing away and improv that is how not have time works. I'm afraid to say

Richard Minkley 45:10

it. So it's simply the transit nature is that it exists on the stage, but then doesn't continue. It. There's no there's nothing left Once you start, there's no script book. So why, how. I'm going to really drill into this, where does that transient nature come from in the craft itself? Because I understand the process of we're doing improv then we stop and the improv is gone. But as we know, there is a lot of craft and thought and process that people learn and understand before they go and do improv or or you know, there is a body of knowledge that has been built about improv were in that does this transient nature come from?

Ben MacPhearson 45:54

I think you're trying to separate an idea from this that isn't really separable.

Richard Minkley 46:04

go on.

Ben MacPhearson 46:07

So, in terms of improv improv performance, as opposed to improv rehearsal or devising theatre, the fact that you are putting instances and moments on stage that are fully freely formed, mean that by its very nature, it is transient, it is there and it is gone. Whereas I feel the question that's being asked at me is, it is it is, it is like asking, why does that fly have wings, you know? Yeah. In part of the things that make up improv is the fact it's got transitive nature.

Richard Minkley 46:57

I see what you mean. So one of the things I was thinking of is how, because fundamentally the thing that people always say about improv is that it's Yes, and it's accepting and building. But it seems that

there isn't a connection between that transient nature of what you're making and that the kind of the rules and the processes that we learn as improvisers to help you put on that transient. It's like almost as if the transient nature of it came before the processes like yes, and and except to build and heightened whatever.

Ben MacPhearson 47:33

Well if we take improv back to its earliest days? It is people sat around a campfire telling stories, you know, in the night to try to understand why that noise keeps going [Hoo-Hoo]. You know,

Richard Minkley 47:48

yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 47:50

And we are trying to use the blocks of communication to form those sentences. So, improv is transient, because communication is transient. And we can pin it down to things like writing things like recording. But the experience that someone listening back to this is going to have is different from the experience that you and I are having here sat face to face talking to each other.

Richard Minkley 48:27

I see what you mean, there is the transient nature of actually happening.

Ben MacPhearson 48:32

Yes.

Richard Minkley 48:34

The transient nature of it actually happening. Wow, that is a fantastic

Ben MacPhearson 48:39

Sometimes. I'm clever.

Richard Minkley 48:41

You certainly are my friend. I'm going to I think that's a really good place to stop and get a cup of tea for a sec. Before we get any more pretentious.

Ben MacPhearson 48:49

Beautiful.

Richard Minkley 48:50

Thank you very much for your time.

c) Part 3 of 3

21st August 2020

Richard Minkley 48:53

Okay, so we are in the second part of the second interview, Richard Minkley interviewing Ben MacPhearson. And he's put away his phone, which was a bad idea 12:37 on the 21st of August 2020. Let's jump straight back in there with a question just putting my phone on aeroplane mode. That was silly of me. Yeah, so we just had a bit of a talk about how the Vox pops came together, and how it feels in that environment where there was lots more things happening. It felt like there was less competition. So moving that on a little bit. Why do you think there was so much growth in 2017 for Missimp?

Ben MacPhearson 49:46

I think that it was a time when we had hope. we hadn't voted for Brexit yet. and sorry.

Richard Minkley 50:00

But it was on the horizon.

Ben MacPhearson 50:01

It was on horizon. Oh no it has, 2016 was a... anyway. No I'm trying to make jokes when I should be talking seriously. There's

Richard Minkley 50:10

Oh no, it would have been 2016. Yeah, you're right.

Ben MacPhearson 50:12

So

Richard Minkley 50:13

and yet you still had hope

Ben MacPhearson 50:14

we were desperately trying to avoid Brexit

Richard Minkley 50:17

End of, end of the political commentary? Why? But No, but seriously, though, because there's all these teams. They're all these shows, there's smash night. More people are also coming, which which happened first, more people coming, more teams being formed, more events being held, or where they simultaneous.

Ben MacPhearson 50:39

So Vox pops formed early 2017, then we would have started having a smash night in March 2018. We started doing smash night in March 2017.

Richard Minkley 51:07

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 51:10

Then we have a new night, we're bringing new people in, we're probably working harder on promoting.

Richard Minkley 51:18

Okay.

Ben MacPhearson 51:20

At that point, then things start to build and grow out from there. So that brings in more people, more people brings more opportunities. I want say the vortex formed, I'm gonna say May or June that year, but don't quote me on it.

Richard Minkley 51:42

The months might be wrong. But is that sequence of the Vox pops smash night vortex? Is that the right sequence?

Ben MacPhearson 51:49

as best as I can remember it? Yes.

Richard Minkley 51:51

Good enough for oral history.

Ben MacPhearson 51:55

And it's a case a little bit of build it and they will come, you know, feel the dreams, we're establishing some something and if you promote it well enough, and especially in a city that's as culturally hungry as Nottingham is. You get you get an audience. And I know we've had people come and join Missimp through coming see things at smash night. Like we had a few people come join us through seeing things at the Glee Club from back then. And that builds and swells the the the numbers, the events, we can do. You know, if success breeds success, we're seeing success. So we go, Oh, hey, people really want improv? So let's give them more improv. And for the most part, they did.

Richard Minkley 52:53

Amazing. So there's some things I want to talk pick out there. Because you said you worked hard to promote it or marketing. Did you use Word promote or market?

Ben MacPhearson 53:04

I think I use both.

Richard Minkley 53:05

Well, we worked hard to promote and marketed a fair enough. Well, what does that mean? How did you? How did you What does that harder work mean? What does it look like?

Ben MacPhearson 53:18

Well, as best I can recall, it is a lot of Liam and Nick setting up huge amounts of Facebook posts to be scheduled to go out and then paying to boost them. We've got fantastic amounts of graphic design work. That sort of comes together. Obviously, we've got members of the community if they're in a show, they bring people along, and that sort of swells it and grows it. So online, manual and word of mouth.

Richard Minkley 53:52

Never say those words like that in that order again, because it sounds so much creepy. I'm joking. I'm talking. Let's talk about the butterfly. No, let's not talk about the butterfly. I want that for myself. In fact look, you brought it up now tell us the.

Ben MacPhearson 54:09

I want the credit for this. These are my words

Richard Minkley 54:12

so you in

Ben MacPhearson 54:14

whilst we had

Richard Minkley 54:14

we were talking about the transient nature of improv.

Ben MacPhearson 54:17

Yes.

Richard Minkley 54:18

And you used a very good metaphor that I wanted to steal.

Ben MacPhearson 54:21

Yes,

Richard Minkley 54:21

But here we are go on.

Ben MacPhearson 54:23

I want the credit

Richard Minkley 54:23

got on then.

Ben MacPhearson 54:25

So talking about the transient nature improv, the reason why improv doesn't work is when you are doesn't work as well as when you record it is the is out of its natural habitat. You can see a lion in a zoo, but it's not the same as going on a safari and seeing a lion or just seeing one out in the white. improv when it's recorded is like a butterfly with a pin in it. And now I've said it.

Richard Minkley 54:52

and I was like yeah, it's it's a butterfly, but it's not really a proper butterfly. No. It's got a pin in it and it's dead.

Ben MacPhearson 54:59

Yeah. You can see the way the body works. You can see all the bits of it, but you want to see a butterfly flapping around. That's where the real beauty of it comes from.

Richard Minkley 55:07

Are you happy now?

Ben MacPhearson 55:08

Very.

Richard Minkley 55:09

So you said earlier that Nottingham was a culturally hungry city. What does that mean?

Ben MacPhearson 55:17

So I think it's any population hub of a certain size has an appetite for going out to do things. I think Nottingham is quite a young city. So the people there tend to have more of an appetite for that. So whether it's going to the cinema or going out clubbing, going to the theatre, going to dance shows kickboxing displays, you know, cultural festival, that kind of thing. Nottingham is a city that really engages with those. I can think of, So it is a it has set up its own sort of indie festival in splendour. It's set up the waterfront festival hockey hustle, there are loads of events where people want to go out and engage with stuff,

Richard Minkley 56:09

for example, Nottingham Comedy Festival,

Ben MacPhearson 56:11

Nottingham Comedy Festival. And we have a population that is sort of really receptive to that. And I think part of the benefits of that, because we're still a nuclear focus city. So everything kind of you go from the market square and work out. And those that that sort of a hub, there is a hub people can go to for it.

Richard Minkley 56:41

Like you were saying earlier, you go to the city centre, for the things you don't believe there and go to Arnold to do something or Beeston or Kimberley or someone like that.

Ben MacPhearson 56:49

exactly. And having sort of the idea of going into town for something is, I think still very prevalent. I think about where I grew up in Suffolk, there's a brilliant Little Theatre called the sir john Mills theatre run by a company called Eastern angles. And they'd do brilliant shows fantastic local theatre group, professional outfit, and they do most incredible Christmas stories, not pantos, but they'll do like a parody of a particular genre. And it's farcical and funny and excellent. And the theatre is not really walking distance from the town centre. So you get a lot of families and stuff driving up, they've got a really devoted fan base, but you can't just grab a bus in to go to that theatre. Whereas I think in Nottingham, it's very easy to get in to go to the things

Richard Minkley 58:01

that that's interesting, because you said you earlier we were talking about looking for a venue and trying to make it accessible. And that I assumed to have meant things like wheelchairs, essentially.

Ben MacPhearson 58:12

Yeah. And that was what I meant at the time. But there is another aspect of that that is how not just how easy is it to get into but how easy is it to get to as well. You know, what will how easy to is their parking near by is their public transport. And I think one of the great benefits that Missimp has is that we have always done stuff in the city centre, you know, the first place I went to Missimp things was the Blue Room in the old Art Org building, right by the station. I mean, that kind of says it all to me, you know, right, by the station, tram stops right at the station, you know, right by the Broadmarsh bus station. You know,

Richard Minkley 58:59

when that existed

Ben MacPhearson 59:00

when that, well its coming back soon?

Richard Minkley 59:02

Oh, yes, of course. We'll, we'll see all sorts of things happening over there. But that is a different topic for a different time. topic of conversation at the moment is Missimp. And it feels like we've we've had a bit of an explore around this growth. We've talked about vox pops vortex smash night, a sense of stepping up, particularly on Facebook and graphics and you the audience is growing. What changed next, because I'm aware that you I kind of just want to follow it organically. But the problem is you've said that you set out a plan.

Ben MacPhearson 59:41

Yeah. So

Richard Minkley 59:42

So we've kind of jumped. There was this sense of people bringing things together and you wanted to have a more formal structure because you had old bank account, then we jumped over to this stream over here.

Ben MacPhearson 59:55

I should clarify. not that big.

Richard Minkley 59:58

But like,

Ben MacPhearson 59:58

Okay, we're not, We're bigger than a scout group. We're not a football club.

Richard Minkley 1:00:06

Now, I assume you can't tell me how much is in. I'm going to have this on record, because I feel like this is an appropriate way to test your boundaries.

Ben MacPhearson 1:00:15

Go for it.

Richard Minkley 1:00:16

How much is in the bank account?

Ben MacPhearson 1:00:17

Fuck off.

Richard Minkley 1:00:19

Okay,

Ben MacPhearson 1:00:19

um,

Richard Minkley 1:00:20

but you were worried about tax, though.

Ben MacPhearson 1:00:25

Yeah. That there comes a point when any sort of thing is earning stuff. And it's like, well, we should probably be declaring tax on this because we are, you know, we are successful, and we have an obligation to pay back in, you know, we benefit from, you know, subsidies to, you know, travel and stuff and all the all the benefits of tax, but if we're not paying it, well, that's morally wrong.

Richard Minkley 1:00:55

So Missimp got to a point where it both could and needed to pay tax.

Ben MacPhearson 1:01:01

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:01:02

Okay. That in itself is a remarkable thing for improv.

Ben MacPhearson 1:01:05

It's pretty crazy, isn't it?

Richard Minkley 1:01:06

Yeah. Like? So, yeah. So, yeah, this, this plan has been laid out. How was the plan introduced to the community? What, again, because we talked earlier about how everything was done in the pub after a gig.

Ben MacPhearson 1:01:25

So we start setting up a, we're running things through the slack service. So multiple threads sharing different ideas on different channels. And we have those who are organising stuff and doing things through there. Which it, just because it's the easiest, simplest way, big shout out to slack, thank you for your sponsorship money.

Richard Minkley 1:01:50

They ooooh for the sake of the National Lottery. the only the only sponsor we have are those beautiful, beautiful lottery players from the National Lottery. Don't you worry guys, slack are nowhere near this.

Ben MacPhearson 1:02:02

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:02:02

But slack was very useful. Were you using that? before the plan? Or is that a recent.

Ben MacPhearson 1:02:10

We using that? mid 2017,

Richard Minkley 1:02:13

mid 2017. So that again, it's another example of things becoming a little bit more you need something here?

Ben MacPhearson 1:02:19

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:02:20

Okay.

Ben MacPhearson 1:02:23

And then we're sort of chatting on this. And we get this, we shake out the idea of what we want things to be. And then we have, I think, for the first time ever, a Missimp, AGM in early 2018. And here we say, we have our 20th anniversary coming up this October. This is what we've got planned. So it was shows workshops, that kind of thing. The birthday party, and we laid out the idea of the future we had for Missimp, which was a structure of an executive, a community hub, and oversight body.

Richard Minkley 1:03:09

And an oversight body.

Ben MacPhearson 1:03:11

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:03:11

so AGM is brilliant for a historian like me, because all of a sudden things are being written down. which in itself is

Ben MacPhearson 1:03:21

you say that. To the best of my knowledge, there are not minutes from the AGM because it was more like a, it wasn't. It wasn't a voting event. There was no there's no formal organisation to.

Richard Minkley 1:03:37

It was more general than meeting.

Ben MacPhearson 1:03:40

Yes.

Richard Minkley 1:03:41

So in that case,

Ben MacPhearson 1:03:42

and also it was far less annual, because we've not had one since. So, So mostly had a G,

Richard Minkley 1:03:47

we had a general

Ben MacPhearson 1:03:48

We had a G.

Richard Minkley 1:03:51

so in that case, yeah. So you introduce these three ideas? Exec. community hub, and oversight. Yeah. And you also introduced the idea of the 20th anniversary.

Ben MacPhearson 1:04:02

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:04:02

So let's, let's, let's break into that a bit. So what are these? Because there's a little bit of a weird tautology here where we are talking about the future that was in the past.

Ben MacPhearson 1:04:15

Yes.

Richard Minkley 1:04:15

So what was that future of exec community [of] oversight.

Ben MacPhearson 1:04:22

And, again, this is something we haven't reviewed in a while just by the nature, because we are a primarily volunteer organisation and no one gets paid for the work they do. These are still things we want to properly set up but right now we need to keep, well, I would say the lights on but we don't have a building to keep the lights on.

Richard Minkley 1:04:43

Well, also a pandemic hit. So

Ben MacPhearson 1:04:46

yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:04:46

things have taken a bit of a pause. But

Ben MacPhearson 1:04:49

we have an executive who are the ones who do the work and oversight body from people who are in the community, and maybe outside of it as well. So people who've got maybe more experience in

running arts organisations, people with more experience of how the, like politics and things works, how building maintenance, how diversity inclusivity, a group of people who would sort of provide guidance and make sure things are being done properly, and that the executive are being responsible with what they're doing. And then a community hub so that we can respond to and work for the people we say we're working for, and they've got a more direct line of communication to us.

Richard Minkley 1:05:42

That's interesting. So and also of those three, the exec feels like it had already become something that was beginning to exist.

Ben MacPhearson 1:05:51

Yes,

Richard Minkley 1:05:52

It. Was it formally We are the exact or was it more that process of things coming together?

Ben MacPhearson 1:05:58

So the formalisation of that didn't really happen until we were registered as CIC, which happened in late 2019.

Richard Minkley 1:06:15

[taping noises] That's weird, yeah its shaking. Oh, I'm sorry. Um, so Okay, so who were the exec moments at that AGM meeting moment?

Ben MacPhearson 1:06:24

So

Richard Minkley 1:06:25

or who was it going to be on that?

Ben MacPhearson 1:06:27

So the way we had it laid out was Nick Tyler, Lloydie. Marilyn, myself, Liam, and Emily.

Richard Minkley 1:06:41

Okay. And now I think the most important question is, what is a community hub? Because it feels like one of those words, which is very noble, but doesn't actually mean anything.

Ben MacPhearson 1:06:52

Yes.

Richard Minkley 1:06:52

So what does a community hub mean.

Ben MacPhearson 1:06:54

so community forum, more like so basically a place where members of the community could voice, their , thethings are enjoying the things they maybe want to see changed. Pick some new ideas to develop stuff, the idea being that, okay, so the community wants to have, let's say, an LGBT focused space. And we could then work to provide that, hopefully, like bringing up the people in the community

hub in the forums, sort of take some responsibility of that, because part of the idea with this is that if there is a community hub, and we have a community used to stepping up putting ideas for working towards it, that when one or more of us step down, there are people who will come along and take on that space.

Richard Minkley 1:07:46

So that so this community hub is is much more of a two way system than just a. it's not only because you just mentioned that it there's there's there's the ability for people to step up through this forum.

Ben MacPhearson 1:08:00

Yes, I perhaps i've given that more sort of, it is not a recruiting ground. But it is a place where if you want to have more of a say in how things are Missimp work, we do that. At the moment. That's more what the Missimp members group does. on with our Facebook community support.

Richard Minkley 1:08:23

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 1:08:26

I don't know if we're gonna move back towards that at the moment. It's not something we've discussed in a while. As I said, we've been keeping the lights on.

Richard Minkley 1:08:34

No, no, that's understandable. But at this moment at the AGM, was there a sense that you were, because you've already mentioned how you learn to look forward when you started taking on responsibility?

Ben MacPhearson 1:08:43

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:08:44

So was that was part of this, also creating something where you could be looking forward and saying, These people aren't going to do it forever? Or were you thinking? That's, were you even thinking about that?

Ben MacPhearson 1:08:59

It was something we've had an idea of in the future. But it was not like, well, Ben is stepping down in two and a half years time, so we need to get someone groomed to take on the stuff that he does. you know, there's nothing like that. There's no there is no direct plan. There is no active search. Okay. for it.

Richard Minkley 1:09:22

That that's really interesting how I'm gonna treat the AGM a little bit like it was a show and ask you How did it go the AGM like Not as just not only as in like, what was said, What happened,

Ben MacPhearson 1:09:35

yeah

Richard Minkley 1:09:35

But what how did you feel it was received and how do you feel? It went?

Ben MacPhearson 1:09:40

So it was led by Nick and Lloydie?

Richard Minkley 1:09:45

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 1:09:46

Sort of people who've been running the lion's share of stuff the longest time. And I remember it being really, really positively received. I think we had a moment there. Where people probably felt more direction and more ownership of their community than they had had the chance to before. Not by any sort of shadowy intent or anything, but because one, one of the issues with the system that we have had and still have, to a certain extent, and that is going to be reduced as we go forward, is that there is the idea of transparency. What is the process doing [here], and the idea is that the people who are on the exec at the moment are the ones who got stuff done. And we're fitting this in around lives. And, of course, we want to consult everyone to make sure everyone's happy with stuff. But also, that ain't how it works, that at the end of the day, bureaucracy, stops things like this working, there must be a certain amount of process. But if you want a show on at the end of June, and it's the start of May, if you have two weeks consultation with everyone to confirm that everyone is happy with it in the community, then you've got to have a week to cast it, then you've got to get you know, you've already lost three weeks on getting stuff done. So sometimes you just got to make the choice and say, yeah, this is what's happening. And that is kind of how it works. With the exec and that's something we are

Richard Minkley 1:11:40

sorry, that would have been mine. That's ridiculous to me, sorry, like you were just saying about how that's not how it works, the exec sometimes has to just make decisions and do things.

Ben MacPhearson 1:11:49

Yeah. And we always try to, you know, make the decision that best serves most members of the community.

Richard Minkley 1:11:58

So there's an interesting thing you pointed there, and I appreciate I'm asking for your sense of other people's opinion.

Ben MacPhearson 1:12:05

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:12:06

But you said you felt like people had more direction and more ownership of their community. Once you decided that these people were in charge, and you made it said, this is an executive committee.

Ben MacPhearson 1:12:18

So I think

Richard Minkley 1:12:21

there was it wasn't just that there was also the community hub and the oversight. But

Ben MacPhearson 1:12:25

That that is, you've, you've latched on to the one problem in that. So I think, when people sort of said, Okay, we have a big year coming up this year, we've got a 20th anniversary, we've got a Nottingham Comedy Festival stage we're gonna be running, we have got this, we got that we're gonna be looking for people to help with this. That gives people ownership of the community. We laid out the rough plans for the exec, these will be who we start off with. And then we also said, and as people come on and join the exec, this will be moved to a more community driven thing. So you'll be able to, again, that probably hadn't worked out the process we were using for selecting new members, but it was clear that as things move forward, there would be more of the community and more membership would be able to get involved in the nuts and bolts work of it.

Richard Minkley 1:13:38

That's a fascinating idea. There's a lot of stuff you brought up there. And I think the best thing for me to ask now is simply you've had the AGM, you've had this response. This is in you said early,

Ben MacPhearson 1:13:56

early 2018,

Richard Minkley 1:13:57

early 2018. You've got the 20th anniversary coming up. How did that plan go? Because let's say between January and October, how did it go with that plan? Because it feels like now I've suddenly entered we've been talking about broadly of the both of the interviews we've had over the years, and all of a sudden I've said you're 10 months what happened It feels like we're getting a bit more narrow. But

Ben MacPhearson 1:14:25

so we secured a weekend booking at the Nottingham Playhouse which was done to say by Lloydie. He was the primary content of the Playhouse at the time. Then, we secured Malt Cross because that was the place where the first Missimp show had ever been. And we stayed for the 20th birthday party on the Thursday of the day that happens. We work out workshops that are gonna be going on. So I think we had an introduction to improv and musical improv workshop sort depending on your sort of experience and engagement with stuff. And that was the main thing, then we start, we start looking at slightly more polished merchandise. So we have these beautiful Missimp enamel badges of which I think I've six in my room upstairs.

Richard Minkley 1:15:20

I think I might have a couple as well

Ben MacPhearson 1:15:23

we start, that's when we start sort of getting more filled up banners, that kind of things. We start tightening up the branding for the different shows we're doing.

Richard Minkley 1:15:34

Hmm, that's really interesting. So how, huh? Oh, man. There's so many questions I've got running through my head at the minute Forgive me.

Ben MacPhearson 1:15:51

thats okay,

Richard Minkley 1:15:51

that's interesting. So, okay, let's skip to. So there was, was there anything that happened in between the anniversary? And the AGM? In terms of important changes?

Ben MacPhearson 1:16:12

Yes. So in this period, Lloydie steps down from the exec, which is quite big, because we're sort of now at a point where the people who have been running things are kind of outnumbered by the newer people.

Richard Minkley 1:16:33

That's an interesting phrase,

Ben MacPhearson 1:16:35

I have an understanding of what happened there. I do not know how accurate it is. And I don't think I do any service by sharing that understanding.

Richard Minkley 1:16:47

That's fair enough. That's somebody else's story to tell.

Ben MacPhearson 1:16:50

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:16:54

That's interesting, though. Especially those two phrases, you've said there. So like, Lloydie, obviously left? Did anybody replace him?

Ben MacPhearson 1:17:06

No.

Richard Minkley 1:17:07

So Lloydie left, and the older members as not as an old as in like old people, but like, members who had been there for longer, were now outnumbered by people who had been there for a short period of time.

Ben MacPhearson 1:17:18

So if we assume the if we go back to the triumvirate model,

Richard Minkley 1:17:23

yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 1:17:25

The triumvirate is now part of, there's only one of those original sort of big three left, that's Nick Tyler. And more of the work has been delegated and shared between the sort of the people who had, i'd classified as like left tenants in it, they're now sort of doing a lot of the organisation work as well. And there's more primacy in that there's [we have] greater ownership of the work that's going on, it's not

just doing it because, you know, I'm doing this to help the organiser Missimp is? No, I am one of the organisers of Missimp. At least that's how I felt at the time. And still feel,

Richard Minkley 1:18:07

yeah. Well, you're on the exec committee. So

Ben MacPhearson 1:18:09

Yes

Richard Minkley 1:18:10

yeah. That's interesting, because those two events feel like they tonally clash with one another.

Ben MacPhearson 1:18:19

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:18:20

So how did it feel as a person to be in that? That and when I say that the the the tension and the clash, I mean, between those two tones, I don't mean between individuals between somebody leaving, and less people able to do the executive level work and more ownership and more. Would you take pride or more?

Ben MacPhearson 1:18:45

responsibility,

Richard Minkley 1:18:46

responsibility?

Ben MacPhearson 1:18:51

It's I will, I found it kind of confusing. I had gone away. I want to say, I was I had gone to the States, I think for. Was it the states? No. No, that was previous year. I was out of the country. And I came back [-] And things soured. And I, again, I have an understanding gleaned from about two or three years trying to understand what happened. And I sort of have to accept that I'm never gonna understand the the reality of it.

[-]

Richard Minkley 1:21:21

That's interesting, because I was sitting here, and this is probably useful for the oral history side of things, trying to read into it. So I'm sort of like, oh, Ben's moving up in the world, because he's taking on more responsibility. And you're giving me none of it. Was there? No, was it does it not? Because there's almost like a game of thrones thing where you've eliminated a competitor is their none

Ben MacPhearson 1:21:41

no.

Richard Minkley 1:21:44

I shouldn't be surprised. This sounds reasonable. Because bearing in mind, everybody I talked to but

Ben MacPhearson 1:21:48

Drink your tea

Richard Minkley 1:21:49

yeah, I've drank it. Um,

Ben MacPhearson 1:21:51

oh. Well, it's been nice working with you.

Richard Minkley 1:21:55

That's interesting, though. So

Ben MacPhearson 1:22:01

yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:22:03

Do you remember roughly what period of time that happened? And I'm not asking for like a day, but I'm trying to gauge how close it was to the anniversary.

Ben MacPhearson 1:22:11

I want to say it was May, I think I went. I think I went back to visit my parents. And I want to say we went to Italy. And I think I was in Italy at that time. And then I came back to big changes.

Richard Minkley 1:22:29

Yeah. That's interesting. It's an interesting context to have for what comes next, which is the anniversary.

Ben MacPhearson 1:22:38

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:22:38

So when the plan was, I've got here you booked a weekend at the Playhouse shows at the mall cross workshops, you made enamel badges and banners and all sorts of branding things. What, here's, here's what I'll ask, What do you remember of the actual anniversary?

Ben MacPhearson 1:23:02

So what, I was on the door of the Anniversary Show. And so I was sat at the back of the Malt Cross? Well, the front, if you're going in the back, if you at the stage,

Richard Minkley 1:23:17

you were by the door

Ben MacPhearson 1:23:18

I was by the door. And I remember turning around and looking at so many people in this gorgeous Victorian Music Hall. And I just thought, gosh, how incredibly lucky I am to be part of this community.

Richard Minkley 1:23:40

That's interesting. So what did you. there was much more to the whole 20th anniversary than that. So how did what did you participate in on that weekend?

Ben MacPhearson 1:23:50

So I performed at the malt cross show. we did a little bit with the vox pops.

Richard Minkley 1:24:02

Was that the you keep referring to it as the birthday party or is that what that was the

Ben MacPhearson 1:24:08

yes

Richard Minkley 1:24:08

Malt cross show?

Ben MacPhearson 1:24:09

The malt cross show was like the birthday party and then we were doing stuff that Yeah, so the malt cross was show was more for our community. The Playhouse one was more outward looking and focused on the public.

Richard Minkley 1:24:22

Okay, so you performed at the door at the birthday party,

Ben MacPhearson 1:24:25

yes

Richard Minkley 1:24:25

Malt Cross

Ben MacPhearson 1:24:26

and then did a show at the Nottingham Playhouse. One of the two shows I won't say with a Friday night

Richard Minkley 1:24:36

and this was with the Vox pops

Ben MacPhearson 1:24:37

with the vox pops

Richard Minkley 1:24:38

Vox pops. And did you What did you do anything else? Did you watch the other shows? Did you participate in the workshops?

Ben MacPhearson 1:24:46

I honestly can't remember. I doubt[,] I would have watched the other shows, possibly from the green room possibly from that was It. So we were on second on the Friday night. And so we were warming up in sort of the hour before our show, The vox pops Show, so I couldn't see the vortex. And then we

had. And then I watched both shows the following day, at the Saturday who were Missimp on fire and rhymes against humanity.

Richard Minkley 1:25:36

Fantastic. So this isn't, oh, sorry, I'm pulling my cables around what's happening around here? Sorry about this. Um, that's very interesting, because this is the kind of moment where the kind of story is beginning to come to a close for this particular oral history. I just want to check up on a couple of details about what we've talked about.

Ben MacPhearson 1:26:01

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:26:01

So do you who was the lineup for? The vox pops at the, so

Ben MacPhearson 1:26:12

Playhouse?

Richard Minkley 1:26:12

The Playhouse. Yeah, I'm trying to catch up with the people who have interacted with the Vox pops.

Ben MacPhearson 1:26:16

So the Vox pops. There's a natural attrition of people on any improv team. lives change. Some people thought this was this it wasn't so, whatever. So we had at that point. We have added three new members of the cast. Who are yourself. Betty Costello, and Laurie Owens. Owen. Laurie Owen. I always get I can never remember there's an S at the end of Laurie's name. [Note: Its Laurie Owen]

Richard Minkley 1:26:52

Yeah, they make fun of me a lot for that as well. Laurie owen yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 1:26:59

And at that point, we had lost. Lucy, and Bonnie and Katie.

Richard Minkley 1:27:15

Okay. And also, I believe we'd also mentioned that Sam lane had joined the Vox pops and also left the Vox pops.

Ben MacPhearson 1:27:21

And left the vox pops at that Point. Yeah, he'd gone off to drama school.

Richard Minkley 1:27:24

Fair enough. Okay. I feel kind of exasperated because I want to know what happens next. But at the same time, I'm aware that we've kind of coming to a close. So looking at the time. Yeah, so I'm trying to gauge now. A little bit about the final 20th anniversary, a little bit about what happened next. And that's when things are going to tail off. So looking back on the 20th anniversary. In fact, no, here's a question that I'm going to ask. There's there's a sense that I'm trying to find, which is when did Missimp become a community that knew it was a community? And it feels like, Did Missimp understand itself as a community at the anniversary, the 20th anniversary?

Ben MacPhearson 1:28:26

It's as good a pin as any other to put in the map. That was the first time we celebrated it as a community.

Richard Minkley 1:28:38

That's an interesting way of describing it.

Ben MacPhearson 1:28:40

I think you have to have not been there to not realise that it was a community before then.

Richard Minkley 1:28:46

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 1:28:47

But this is the first time that's the first time that we really said this is what we are and it is worth celebrating.

Richard Minkley 1:28:56

Okay, so how did the 20th anniversary change? In fact, did it change the community? How did it affect that community structure? And I include all that process between the AGM and actually putting the show.

Ben MacPhearson 1:29:13

Well, in terms of what the exact we're up to, we started the process of formalising it towards a community interest company which with that level of formality does start to bring you know, we are a community interest company, therefore, we are interested in our community.

Richard Minkley 1:29:31

Yeah.

Ben MacPhearson 1:29:32

So I think in terms of terms of thought model for the leadership, we are now much more conscious of, are we, this is for the community, how is this for the community, what are we doing for the community, because that is now our interest in terms of how the how the the people who come along to Missimp sort of viewed it. I hope they see it as a celebration of what they create and what they bring.

Richard Minkley 1:30:10

So the way they see it is one way, but I'm also interested in literally how did it represent itself? And I'm going to be more specific with that question, which is like so the 20th anniversary happens from that point onwards, what are what is the regular? What improv is happening by the end of the anniversary?

Ben MacPhearson 1:30:35

end of 2018?

Richard Minkley 1:30:36

yeah,

Ben MacPhearson 1:30:37

yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:30:37

cuz we talked about, like what was happening in 2016. And you were like gorilla burger drop in, rhymes, and little bits of projects like Missimp in action, and

Ben MacPhearson 1:30:47

yeah

Richard Minkley 1:30:47

the consenting partners,

Ben MacPhearson 1:30:48

cool

Richard Minkley 1:30:49

things like that.

Ben MacPhearson 1:30:49

So by the end of 2018, the core of it is still drop-ins. And I struggle to see a time when that is not the core of what Missimp does, because that is a place that you can come and engage with our community and do improv. However, when you're playing with these things, you want to explore more you want to not there's a path or a staircase or a ladder to climb, but you want to climb the staircase path ladder. So we have got more shows, we've got gorilla burger that's still happening, we've now got the Smash night shows that are going on. We're exploring more partnerships with places like the Nottingham Playhouse, like non stop studios, which started more started the following year in 2019. But it sort of has become sort of a fixed part of our calendar, and was sort of growing month by month with the attendance for it.

Richard Minkley 1:31:57

No, that's okay,

Ben MacPhearson 1:31:58

I'm Tired. So, yes, we see a month a month building people are coming to come to these shows, we're bringing more teachers internationally, through friends we've made internationally, sort of in the UK as well. So people like David Escobedo, we are probably more plugged into the UK network, we have more of a sense of identity of who we are of what we provide. And we're sort of more prepared to sort of show it and demonstrated to the world.

Richard Minkley 1:32:35

That is a really big idea. And it feels like, I'm not going to be able to summarise that idea of like we've started building a community. And I think that's one of the the awful, teasers. And the the difficulty with this project is that it feels like, this is all prologue for something that's about to happen, which arguably, is what history is. So we're going to need to leave it there. But I kind of want to look back over the last that that period between 2016 and 2018, maybe 2019 a little bit because your role definitely changed. I'm trying to think of a really good question to understand. So just give me a second to really think about this.

Ben MacPhearson 1:33:29

Do you want to have a little pause whilst I turn off the oven cuz I'm

Richard Minkley 1:33:33

gonna tell you what, yeah, I'm gonna tell you what I'm going to do is unplug this. And you can go and deal with that when I think of a really good question. And we can record me muttering to myself I feel like this is a really suitable way to end the podcast with by the way now we're going to eat some pastry just cuz it keeps going you know.

Ben MacPhearson 1:34:00

Nothing changes

Richard Minkley 1:34:02

plug you back in and this is gonna hurt my ears. Oh, that was unpleasant.

Ben MacPhearson 1:34:10

[blood curdling screech]

Richard Minkley 1:34:11

No, that wasn't just your voice is unpleasant.

Ben MacPhearson 1:34:13

Yes. i know. I know. Some people have described it as molten chocolate being poured into your eye

Richard Minkley 1:34:20

Thats nasty. Thats ben. Nasty. I suppose the. I suppose the final question is really I'm going to link it right back up to now and say let's not go to now. Let's go to just a little bit before the pandemic because it feels like the pandemic is a whole other story. What is this? What is Missimp Now, in terms of, and I'm not necessarily asking for specific details, but we've come to a point where the history and now kind of meet. what is Missimp Now?

Ben MacPhearson 1:35:17

Missimp is a place where I hope anyone who wants to get involved in improv can come along and explore that. feel welcome, and find friends. And get a sense of that lovely feeling that I had on the 20th anniversary, where I looked around myself and thought, Gosh, aren't I lucky? I want Missimp to be a place that has a warmth, and a magic to it to anyone who comes along. Where you can find out new things about yourself. You can learn you can grow, you can find friends, where you perhaps are isolated, where you can find confidence where you felt timid. And where you can just make some shit up.

Richard Minkley 1:36:27

It's easy to forget with all this profound conversation we're having that it's just literally people dicking about on a stage, isn't it?

Ben MacPhearson 1:36:32

I'm going to aggressively imagine for you now.

Richard Minkley 1:36:35

Gonna aggressively imagine for you

Ben MacPhearson 1:36:37

don't film it. Otherwise, I have to put a pin in myself.

Richard Minkley 1:36:41

Is there anything else you want to add before we round up your interview? And this would be the final interview. So if there is something you want to add? I'll give you the little bit of time today. Nick Tyler murdered [laughing, cos its a joke, srsly, nick didn't kill anyone] Have you got any more libel you wanna make.

Ben MacPhearson 1:36:57

Yes, yes, Adidas, Go fuck yourself. It's strange doing this project as a history. Because history is normally a study of dead things. And when we're talking now, on August, the 21st 2020, middle global pandemic. There is the next chapter, about a start. We've had a member of the executives step down. in a open and non confusing way, for reasons that are not conflict or distress. And we're like we started talking to people about now if you want to put yourself forward for that step forward. And this is the first time that we have had the structure and stability that we can do things in the way we want to which is open, which is you know, led by people in the community who put themselves forward, not just the people who organise stuff, you know, there is the it is a time where the people who lead our community are making a conscious choice to lead it. as opposed to sort of falling into it, which I feel has been how it's worked previously. And the people who are going to be joining us and I don't know who they are yet, in fact, having a zoom call about that in

Richard Minkley 1:39:02

oh, fuck

Ben MacPhearson 1:39:05

for hours about this, are going to stamp something really incredible on this community and the doing a project like this risks turning something like Missimp into a monolith. a single great rock edifice carved with great wisdom of yes and the core ideas of improv and important dates when teams formed and

Richard Minkley 1:39:41

Just says at the top heightened,

Ben MacPhearson 1:39:43

yes, thats awful. important dates when teams form and as interesting as that is that is not Missimp that is the story that led us here. But we are a living community. And I think we are hopeful community. And in moving forward with this stuff in finding the changes that are going on at the moment. We only strengthen it if we stay true to those principles and those ideas that we hold important.

Richard Minkley 1:40:33

So we're not just corpses shambling with intent then

Ben MacPhearson 1:40:37

you just turned my lines against me.

Richard Minkley 1:40:39

Yes, I did. En Guard.

Ben MacPhearson 1:40:43

You're swine.

Richard Minkley 1:40:44

Ben, thank you so much for your time.

Ben MacPhearson 1:40:47

thank you.

Richard Minkley 1:40:48

Yeah, thank you.

9. Emily Brady

9.1. Interview 1 of 2

a) Part 1 of 2

13th august 2020

Disclaimer

While still very active in nottingham's improv scene, Emily Brady is no longer part of the community's executive group.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

improv, nottingham, people, bit, Edinburgh, rhymes, remember, Marilyn, year, hindsight, glee club, point, audition, felt, ben, troupe, shows, musical, called, university

SPEAKERS

Emily Brady, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

We are recording. And the levels are good. So this is Richard Minkley interviewing Emily Brady who is waving at me. Hello. For the Missimp oral history podcast. It is the 13th of August 2020 at 1046. And that's the boring stuff out the way. Hello, how are you?

Emily Brady 00:22

Hi, Richard.

Richard Minkley 00:24

I'm going to jump in with the first question. What is your first memory of Missimp?

Emily Brady 00:32

Oh, first question, I already can't answer it completely. To be so I think my first memory of Missimp was I went to the University of Nottingham. And I went to the improv society. And it was one of the main reasons I went to the University of Nottingham

Richard Minkley 00:51

Really,

Emily Brady 00:52

because it had an improv society, like the course was great. And the campus was beautiful. But then it was like, finding out it had an improv society was like the final like a sign that I was like, yeah, this is where I need to be. So I joined the University of Nottingham improv society. And they had a really, really, at the time, like a really good system of like, socials, which in hindsight, was slightly

questionable practice purely because one of the main socials they did was at the time Missimp had a monthly show at the Glee Club.

Richard Minkley 01:28

Yes,

Emily Brady 01:28

in the big room. And I think I might be wrong. But I think what used to happen was, people would say, oh, we're having a event this week, this month social is we're going to Glee Club to see Missimp. Let us know if you're coming. And we'll book the tickets. And then they'd booked the tickets, but they take like a pound or two extra, like, as a society. So they'd make like, not much because they'd only be like, 12 people go, but they'd made like 12 pounds. So they'd sort of say the tickets were like a pound more expensive than they were, which in hindsight, was not best practice. But it did mean that like, probably about a dozen to 20 people, each time from the university, we're going to see Missimp shows that the Glee,

Richard Minkley 02:09

okay

Emily Brady 02:10

yes, this ended the next year when I was social Secretary because Ben was then in Missimp, and was like Ben MacPhearson, was then in Missimp. And said guys just booked directly, it's cheaper. And also, probably not questionable. But that's how it was like, at the time, I think everything was a little bit more like, like chill with stuff like that. So the first time I saw Missimp, was we had social and we went to one of their shows the Glee Club. And I can just remember it being this like, it was one of the first times I'd seen live improv outside of the Comedy Store. Because I was, obviously there's a lot of improv clubs, when you're under 18, you can't go to them. And because my birthday is in July, that was probably one of the first times I ever saw live improv. And I just remember this, the feeling of it was like, it was so rock and roll, like it was like, these people were like, Nick and Marilyn, were like rock stars to me. And I remember the room being really full. And I just remember it being like, Oh, my God, that's amazing. That's what I want to do. But I'll never get to that level. And it wasn't it was just, you know, the mix of all the lights and all the music and the style of it at the time was it was short form. But it was the kind of short form that you can tell that, like, they were so good at it, that they kind of were breaking the rules a lot. And at the time, I was just learning improv I had been doing improv for like two months, maybe. And yeah, it was just like, the sensation of seeing, like people who have just the audience in the palm of their hands. Was it made such an impression on me? And, and there was a real sense, like, even then of like, they were sort of making jokes and people in the audience who I didn't know. And I was like, Oh, this is like a community of people. But I was at the time, I think there was a little bit more of a not a divide between the University improv and Missimp because there was it wasn't like a bad thing. It was just like, oh, that's the grownups improv. Do you know what I mean? When you're at university, you're like, this is the students improv. And that's the like grown ups improv and never the twain shall meet. But I remember I have a very clear memory of the first conversation I had with Nick and Marilyn, because I was 18 and stupid. And we were in the bar downstairs in Glee Club after the show. And I was chatting to Marilyn, and she was saying, Oh, I'm an actor. And I was like, that's the coolest thing I've ever heard. And I was like, oh, how long have you been together? She was like, Oh, I can't remember at that point. I think it must have been like, at least like a dozen years, probably more and was like he married just like no, I was like, you should get married like in that

confidence of an 18 year old. who doesn't know any better. And she was Like, yeah, maybe. But yeah, that was the first interaction I had with Missimp.

Richard Minkley 05:08

Wow. That's interesting. Do you remember any of the like contents of that show? So you were with your social, you weren't social secretary at this time, you kind of got invited along and said, Hey, we're going to this thing we're gonna buy tickets do da do da do and you went with a bunch of people to see Missimp. Do you remember, don't any of the games or any of the actual bits of the show?

Emily Brady 05:33

It's very, because I went and saw them quite a lot of times that first year, so a lot of them blur into one. So I don't remember anything from that first show, that I can say with confidence was from that first show? I remember I saw, I think Martin and Nick do a scene. And they were both like straddling chairs and just talking. I don't know why that's imprinted on my memory. But for some reason it is and I do remember, there was a game of questions only at one point where Marilyn refused to lose. I have a really clear memory of that, because I was just at the point of learning like, yes, and and like, oh, part of the fun of short form is like losing, and to see like Marilyn just like no, I'm gonna like absolutely just Boss this, no one in the row behind me is getting a go. I was like, at the time I was kind of scandalised by it. But I think what I didn't appreciate at the time, because obviously, I was friends with the people in my team, but I hadn't known them for like five years, or 10 years, like Marilyn had. And it was kind of the game within the game that she was playing. And so seeing that, like I can still remember that really clearly. Because I was just like, What? Why did she do that? She's so good at improv, why did she like, get it wrong like that? And then it wasn't until afterwards? I was like, Oh, no, that's the that's the game she was playing. That was the real game. They were playing like, it wasn't questions only it was like, how much of a dick can Marilyn be. And everyone was in on it was hilarious. And the big one of the big things I remember about that first year of doing improv, at uni with Missimp was Missimp had a podcast. And at the time, I can't remember who was doing it. I know it was Lloydie, Nick and Marilyn a lot. But they were doing this podcast. And to be honest, I didn't listen to it a whole lot. But I remember that Ben MacPhearson really did. And we did a show at the Nottingham new Theatre in my first year. Because just as a side note, the way that the university troupe worked then was that you had your wider community of people who came along every Sunday and you performed together. Like it was almost sort of like a drop in workshop for two hours. And then they auditioned for the troupe that would get to perform in Edinburgh. And that's changed since then. I think they've figured out a way to make it a bit more like other people in the community get performance opportunities outside of the troupe. But at the time, it was like pretty much only the troupe got any performance opportunities. So that year, we sort of we got to do a bunch of like pub shows and a show at the nottingham new theatre and we got to go up to Edinburgh. And we did a show at the Nottingham new theatre called the Hamlet. Which was, I always say it was in hindsight was a bit of a steep learning curve for me because it was my first I've been doing improv maybe I think the auditions were in October. And we did the show in January. And it was masked monologues. So yeah. So we had like, i can't Remember what they're called. Now. I think they're half masks with different facial expressions on them. You'd go out one at a time, and you do a monologue about living in this town. That was the hamlet and it would change every show. So that I think there was [train turn] that's the only way I can remember all I can weirdly I can remember all the shows, but I can't remember what they were. The names were. But Nick and Marilyn and Lloydie came to a show. And this is such a like humble brag. But at the time on one of the things in this show was there was a musical number and I hated monologues. But I loved the musical number because I was like yes structure. I've always been quite my comfort zone has always been musical improv. So every single show I was just like, everyone else likes doing the musical number

but I was the only one who was absolutely like, this is like, my like it's like walking a tightrope, but I know there's a safety net underneath it rather than like a Lake full of crocodile, every show I was like, I mean, if no one else wants to do the musical number I will. So we did. And at the time, I know that Missimp were doing quite a lot with Heather and Joe. And they were doing quite a lot of music. They just started doing like musical short form games. Which I can remember a few of those actually like, like, sort of scene into to songs in at the Glee Club. And it was fantastic. But I remember we, we did the show. And afterwards, like a good while afterwards, Ben came up to me was like, Did you hear that You're on the like, Missimp podcast. I was like, What? No. And I listened to it. And they'd like, they were talking about the show. And they were like, Well, yes, Emily was really good. And she she made the show makes sense. And her song was great. And then they moved on to talk about something else. And literally I was such a dweeb when I was 18, because I replayed the clip of them talking about me like 30 times. And it made such a like, to have people that I thought was so cool. Like, talk about me, like that was like, Oh, my God, hurray. And it gave me such a like confidence boost as well.

Richard Minkley 11:15

Wow. There's so much I want to ask about, but I'm going to start with the most important one. So it was your first year of university that you met. Well not met Missimp. But you went to that show? Well, do you remember what year that was?

Emily Brady 11:29

2011

Richard Minkley 11:30

2011 just gonna put 2011 [come back to that].

Emily Brady 11:35

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 11:36

Okay, so just to pick up on a couple of details. Scene into song, whats scene into song?

Emily Brady 11:46

Yeah, scene into song is kind of what it sounds like. So you're doing a scene. And then it basically it turns into a song. And that's the end of the scene after the one song. So it's a bit like, it's kind of like what rhymes against humanity do now, which is you start with a scene and you play out like a normal scene. And then when you kind of reach an emotional hypo point, or maybe even just a particularly funny joke that you want to sing about for a bit, and then the musician comes in and like, supports you under it.

Richard Minkley 12:19

Yeah. That's interesting. You remember who the musician was?

Emily Brady 12:22

I don't, no.

Richard Minkley 12:23

Oh, of course, you were in the audience.

Emily Brady 12:24

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 12:25

Was there like a did they ring a bell? Or was it just they the piano would start and they'd start singing?

Emily Brady 12:30

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 12:30

Okay.

Emily Brady 12:31

Pretty much that,

Richard Minkley 12:32

that's really interesting. So what was the relationship between? I'm trying to think of what's the next best point to go to? Yeah. You said you were in the improv society when Ben was there. Do you remember who was? Especially in that first year? Because we're going to build up this a little bit. But do you remember who was there in the improv society in that first year?

Emily Brady 12:57

Yeah. So there was the, oh. This is going to be really awkward if I can't remember people. So in the student improv Nottingham society in my first year, it's, it's kind of helpful if I think in terms of like, the exec, but it was the committee. So there was Amy Dickinson, who's my very dear friend who lives in Brighton now. She was the creative director, which meant that she ran the Sunday sessions. There was, I think, a guy called Mike Carlin, who was a social secretary. I think he was social secretary. There was, I can see everyone's faces.

Richard Minkley 13:38

And they're really doing really well for the oral history.

Emily Brady 13:41

Yeah. Oh, there's a guy called Pete Allott. And he was the troupe director of the first year. And he was actually a musician. He might have even been the person who did it at the Glee Club. I can't quite remember so because that's why my first year at Nottingham did become so musical improv heavy because he was musician. Very, very good musical improviser. And I think he could sort of sense that a lot of us were like, please, yes, musical stuff. And, and then there was a few like other people, like Rob page was in his final year and he now does. He might even have just graduated. He now does musical improv. He now just does improv in Northridge. And then there was a few other people who sort of came along but didn't really do improv, but we're sort of there for the community aspect. Oh, Tim Meredith was around at the time. He was in his second year. And yeah, he was in the new theatre show. Yeah, there were, oh my goodness. There were loads of people. And yeah, so that that's as many of the there's a few people on the exec that I could think of, but there was also so yet Tim was in the troupe, a lady called Tarry was in the troupe. A guy called Ben Hollins was in the troop lady called Gabby was in the troupe. And oh, my goodness, I feel so bad. Oh, Alex, who now lives who was American, he came over for like a year abroad. And he did a year. And, of course, I don't know if I've

said it already. But Rebecca Ellis. She was in the troupe first year and then directed at the second year.

Richard Minkley 15:24

ok

Emily Brady 15:25

So yeah,

Richard Minkley 15:26

that's interesting.

Emily Brady 15:27

lots of people

Richard Minkley 15:27

So you were so we've got a sense of the improv society. We've got a sense of the Glee show. Did you do any other Missimp stuff? Because was this at the time where they were running? drop-ins? Or

Emily Brady 15:38

Yeah, they were, I kind of felt a little bit like, again, like I sort of said earlier, at the time, it was the grown ups improv was Missimp. And we had our own little world and our own little community. And that was kind of enough for me at the point. The one thing I did do with Missimp, in my first year, but I can't remember the exact date was they had workshops with Heather and Joe, at some point from the maydays. Because I think that was when Lloydie was very keen on sort of bringing starting to bring more like narrative and more musical stuff into Missimp. So I saw that they were doing a workshop. Actually, no, I tell you, I'm lying. They did, they did a workshop, which was like a, I think, like a weekend thing where you paid for it. But they also did a musical drop in on a Thursday, which was like, you know, their normal rate, like five pounds,

Richard Minkley 16:31

just a one off drop in?

Emily Brady 16:32

Yeah. I think I went to, they did one like in my second year as well. And I went to that. But there was my first year there was one as well. And I remember I went to that and was just like, it was really, really great. Like it was it was really good. And it just it felt a lot more like still it was still very fun. But like a bit more grown up. And just that little bit more like I don't even quite know how to articulate it. But like, there was because I think with with the uni stuff, it was great. But you were We were quite young, you were learning from people who've only been doing improv for a year. And so it worked. It did work like really well. But then to have like those kind of two hour classes with people you didn't know, with teachers you didn't know, like, was just really, really great fun. And I remember those really clearly.

Richard Minkley 17:24

I have two questions on the Heather and Joe thing. Which one should I go with First? Yeah, you use the phrase, it was more adult when you at the Heather and Joe ones. what? Yeah. You said I really don't know how to describe it. Could you describe? But like, Yeah, what do you mean by it felt more adult?

Emily Brady 17:48

Well, I think just at the time, I was enjoying being a student so much, and I was enjoying being part of the student community. And then you sort of I went to this class, and it was all, you know, people who were now our age, which was like, which was great and really different. But at the time, I was just enjoying the community that I was in, and that was taking up so much of my time that I didn't feel the like, need to take advantage of what Missimp was offering at the time. And I was Yeah, I was just enjoying being part of the society that I was in. And also, I've got to say, I do think for a long time, I didn't feel like I was I stuck, I had really low self esteem about my improv for quite a while. And even though I now know, that is not the case at all, when I would have rocked it, I was really scared about the prospect of going to something like a drop in where I didn't know anyone. And I also had this sort of perception that like everyone would be so much better than me, and it would just be really intimidating. I think I kind of fell into a bit of a safety bubble with the, you know, university group that I found myself in. So yeah, I think I kind of regret not taking more advantage of the Missimp stuff while I could but also, I'm really glad that I came to it when I did. So. Hashtag no regrets.

Richard Minkley 19:12

I think that might be the first hash tag in the oral history. i like it. so what did you do with the Heather and Joe workshop? Do you remember what what they taught you or how they engaged with you?

Emily Brady 19:21

Yeah. So again, the slight problem is that this is this was this would have been in 2012, one of these workshops and then there was one the following year in my in my second year, so I can't quite remember which one it was. But I remember we did counterpoint songs. And that was my first time ever doing anything like that before we'd sort of done either, you know, like duets, or some solos or like it was always kind of scenes into song format. And then we did counterpoint songs in this workshop, which is where you've got two characters and character a sings a verse, character B sings a verse, and then you sing your verses again at the same time and you like overlay them into each other I remember being like witchcraft. And I remember I did that. And there's actually, maybe I shouldn't say this. But there's a video on the Missimp Facebook page of one of their musical workshops where we did like a group number. And there was like four of us. And I think James Dolby was in it as well. But I can't remember exactly what the thing was about. But I've seen the like every time because there's before the lockdown, there weren't that many videos on the Missimp Facebook page. So if I ever accidentally picked on it, the [...] picture was me with like, my arms, akimbo, like doing some dance move. And I was like, oh, like, 19 year old Emily, what you doing?

Richard Minkley 20:41

That's fascinating. Um, witchcraft. What do you mean witchcraft?

Emily Brady 20:47

I think I was just just the sort of the magic of improv if you like. Like, I think, at the time, I was very much in the stage of doing improv where my confidence was really low. And I was kind of looking for answers. So I went through a bit of a phase of like, reading lots of improv books. And, you know, sort of the troupe director as well, Pete was very into Keith Johnston. So there was a lot of like, not not heavy handed theory stuff, but there was a lot of theory stuff there. And especially when we were doing the Edinburgh show that we came to do, the pattern was very much we do like a 15 minutes show. And then we discuss it for like 40 minutes. So I got a very analytical improv brain. And I think I

hit that point. You know, what's it called, you know, the gap between when you're just good enough at something to know how not good you are yet?

Richard Minkley 21:47

Oh, the

Emily Brady 21:49

edit it in later.

Richard Minkley 21:51

conscious competence,

Emily Brady 21:54

continuous

Richard Minkley 21:54

no, its conscious incompetence,

Emily Brady 21:55

conscious incompetence, I was at that stage and I was kind of looking for answers. And I think improv was just starting to maybe not be as magic for me as it had been, because like, I was, in my own head about it quite a bit. And I was like, I'm actually not going to be very good at this ever. And then I remember I did that exercise and was like, Oh, it's that feeling. Again, it's back like that. Like, I think Robin Williams called it like open field running. And that's the best description of it. I've heard where it's like, oh, I'm running again. So yeah, thanks, Missimp.

Richard Minkley 22:30

That's interesting. So how did your there's a there we are going to trip happily between your university life and your Missimp life. But over the next like, because we're in 2013. It's about your second year in university, I think, does that Is that about right?

Emily Brady 22:49

Yeah. So first year improv I did the new theatre show and then Edinburgh. It's worth quickly pointing out that they recast the troupe between New Theatre in Edinburgh, which was not the nicest move, because there were I think, there were a no, there was seven or eight of us in the troupe, the new theatre show. And I think we all just were a bit overexcited and a little bit hard to manage. So the producer and director decided that manage Edinburgh, they needed to cut down the troop. So we will have to re audition. Which I was very, very lucky just to get into. But it was like a bit of a in hindsight, it was I completely understand why it was done. Because we were like, you know, eight idiots who were very hard to manage and doing that in Edinburgh would have been a nightmare. But that was very in hindsight, like, I don't think it was great for my confidence. And it was, it was just a bit messy. But we did Edinburgh and it's great. And

Richard Minkley 22:50

how many shows did you do in Edinburgh? Like how long were you there?

Emily Brady 23:53

We did six I think we did Monday to Saturday. And we were at Greenside. And it was a church. And yeah, it was it was great. It was one of those annoying situations where we didn't quite capture the magic of the rehearsals until like, two shows near the end. But the shows themselves were really good. We just got no au[dience] we had like, we had one show that like 6 people in the audience. But then, yeah, it was, you know. I look back on that, like with so much affection for it.

Richard Minkley 24:24

Yeah.

Emily Brady 24:25

And again, like being at the fringe was just amazing. And we did one week of shows and then when we could just like being at the fringe and it was Yeah, it was amazing. I stayed with James Ross, who at the time ran fat kitten and improv, which was a troupe in London. And they came and did a bunch of shows with us at the university that year.

Richard Minkley 24:46

They came to Nottingham

Emily Brady 24:47

yeah

Richard Minkley 24:48

amazing.

Emily Brady 24:48

They did a we did like a fat. It because they did a show called fat Kitten versus the world where they did you know improv battles with other troupes. They did one with austentatious

Richard Minkley 24:59

Really?

Emily Brady 25:00

2012? Yeah, they came and did one with us.

Richard Minkley 25:03

Oh,

Emily Brady 25:04

it was great. But yeah, so that was my first year. And then second year. Oh, and I became social secretary at the end of first year.

Richard Minkley 25:12

Fantastic. So how did your improv? Yeah, how did you improve like progress over the next like two years while you're at university? Because University kind of, especially in your first three years, it feels like it comes as a block of your life?

Emily Brady 25:27

Yeah. Well, actually, my situation was just a little bit different. Because I was doing American Studies and I took a year abroad.

Richard Minkley 25:35

really.

Emily Brady 25:36

So I, yeah, second year, I was social sec. I was in the troop again. We did a show at, I would say my relationship with Missimp didn't really change that year, like had sort of go and see shows and be wowed by them. And I yes, I said I did a workshop with Heather and Joe at some point when they were there. But beyond that I didn't massively engage. like I still went and saw the shows and enjoyed them. And I have very fond memories of like the pub afterwards with all the Missimp people feeling very grown up. But yeah, and then my, I did Edinburgh again, in my second year. And then my third year, I went and had a year abroad at the College of New Jersey, which I was really excited about because they had an improv team. But the way that they do their improv is the first, you audition and it's a two year commitment. So the first year you're training and you're not in any shows until the very end of your first year. And then the second year, you're like a primary troop member. wow And because I wasn't gonna be there for two years, I couldn't be involved. Which, actually, at the time, like it was I had so much other stuff going on in America, like, you know, I was in some plays, I was traveling, I like was meeting new people. And I saw all the shows that they did. And I saw some improv in New York but I can't really remember it. But I definitely sort of for time, kind of not fell out of love with improv, but just it didn't. Like, I feel like now if I was told I couldn't do improv for a year. In any form. I'd be like, Oh, my God. But at the time, I was just like, Oh, well. And then yeah, I had a brilliant year, I came back, I worked at the fringe for a year in the box office. half price hut. And then I went back to uni. So that was my fourth year. And that would have been starting in 2014. And the society was still great that I think that was when people like Sam Marshall, and Lucy and Joe had just, like, first were first years. I think I might be wrong. But it was by that point, I was 21. And I came back and it was you know, a roomful of 18 year olds. And that's no, that they were exactly how I was three years ago. But I just kind of came back and I was like, Oh, it's not my society anymore. Like it's, it's kind of like it's, I'd kind of outgrown it a little bit. And that's no disrespect to the society. But it was just like, if I'd have spent my three years there, it would have been like, great. But by the time I came back from a year abroad, I was like, Oh, I'm just slightly too old. So what I did instead was a guy who was in the troop for the two years that I was in it, Ben Hollands. We did a couple of two prov shows at the new theatre. And they were really great. They had a we did we did it as part of like, an external season, in the winter, and then in the summer again, and yeah, that was that was really fun. And we found a musician. I think his name was Manuel. And he was really great. So it wasn't musical, but we did a two prov show. And that was really good. But again, like I sort of by that point, I don't think Missimp was doing Glee shows in the same way. Or if they had they weren't doing them every month. And also one thing I should say actually is at this point, Ben MacPhearson who is one of the exec members of Missimp. I don't know if I could say this, but he got a really raw deal with the society with the improv society. He didn't get into troupe his first year, which really, really sucked because as I said at that point, that was the only performance anyone got. And then second year, they did. They changed the structure of troop where they had gold, silver and bronze. And if you were in gold, you got to do the new theatre show and Edinburgh, silver you've got to do just the new theatre show. And then bronze you just did the like short form nights and Ben and Tim both were in the bronze group, which, in hindsight like look at, seeing as they're the two of the whole society. They're the two who were like most into improv is just a bit like it is what it is. But so he actually made the transition transition to going and doing Missimp workshops quite, I think in the second in our second year in like 2013 least I

think that's about when he started going. And then by the time that I came back from my year abroad, he was doing like, he was I think that was when he was doing like his first show at the Glee Club. And I was a little bit like, that's So cool. That's Ben's thing. Like, that's, I don't want to tread on like Ben's thing, because he's finally getting the like, appreciation that he deserves. And I don't want to have then swan in and be like, hey, Ben, you found a really nice community of people that appreciate you. How about if I covered make it my thing? Which of course I ultimately did. But yeah, so I think I remember going to I think it was around that time I went and saw Ben do like his first Glee show. But yes, it's a bit it's a bit unclear of the timeline.

Richard Minkley 31:13

No, that's okay. So just a little detail I want to catch up on you said Lucy and Joe. surnames, Lucy?

Emily Brady 31:20

Oh, don't do this to me. I can't I don't know if it's her actual surname, Lucy Imogen is her name on Facebook? I don't think she she kind of has stopped doing what she runs virtual zumba classes now.

Richard Minkley 31:33

That's delightful.

Emily Brady 31:33

She's literally the sole reason I've remained sane in lockdown. And then it's Joe who's in rhymes. What is his surname? Joe? It's not Samuels. That's the guy from the Maydays. It's Joe.

Richard Minkley 31:46

The thing is I I can see his face.

Emily Brady 31:48

Yeah, he's wonderful. I'm gonna have to,

Richard Minkley 31:51

well, we're gonna take a moment to say the Joe in question is brilliant, regardless of what his surname is.

Emily Brady 31:57

Oh,

Richard Minkley 31:58

moving on. That's interesting. So do you remember what your setup was? When you were doing two prov? Was there a particular format? Or was it just a long form show?

Emily Brady 32:06

It was just long form? It was a Harold?

Richard Minkley 32:08

Okay.

Emily Brady 32:09

We did. Yeah, it was we got a word from the audience. It was it ended up being like, a bit. It was very drama-y. It was, we both seen Carrie, Adam Paul, at the fringe few years previously. And they did like the best show I've ever seen. And we were basically trying to do Ciriad and Paul, which was like that. Still very funny. But very heartfelt, and not afraid to go quite sad. And also, oh my god, this is such I kind of discovered I kind of like was developing my acting skills. And I learned how to cry on cue. And, like, no, don't look impressive. I literally was like, I could kind of justify crying and literally every single chance I got, like uuugh. And it got to the stage where Ben had to go like, because we tried not to note each other, but he was like me really need to rein in the like. Like it because I think there was one where it was clearly not about that. And I was just like, it didn't fit the tone. But I made it happen. But yeah, so it was Yeah, we got a word did a Harold there was musical accompaniment.

Richard Minkley 33:23

Okay, so it seems that from what we've heard you talk about, it seems that a lot of your education, you you saw improv, at the comedy, Comedy Club?

Emily Brady 33:36

Comedy Store

Richard Minkley 33:37

Comedy Store, in London, yeah. Comedy Store, you saw Missimp, you did drop-ins and stuff with and shows with the thing and you read books. What books were you reading? Or what books do you remember being particularly influential

Emily Brady 33:53

at the time it was Keith Johnstone, because that was what my troupe director ascribed to. And now I can kind of see the value of it and draw back from it a little bit. But I do think it's really informed a lot of how I especially move on stage and how I think when I'm off stage, like it's, and again, this is my, like, kind of residual 19 year old understanding of it. But it was a lot more like if I just kind of have a movement and go on the story will find me and also like, gaining a bit of appreciation for like, not game as we would understand it now. But like, the conceit of improv, like there's a lot of analogies to like wrestling where it's like, you're making the audience believe that you're fighting but actually you know exactly what the other person is doing.

Richard Minkley 34:46

Yeah.

Emily Brady 34:46

So a lot of that stuff kind of sticks with me. But it wasn't until I remember when I did my we were doing the to prop show in my fourth year that I was like, What am I doing? This is so far out of my comfort zone. And it was our first time sort of trying to do it self taught after a bit of a break. So I literally spent like all of Christmas just reading like, I think I read Nic Napier. Other than that, I can't really remember. But I, we, i had a lot of books, then I was like, somewhere is the answer.

Richard Minkley 35:20

Somewhere is the answer. I'm gonna steal that. That's really interesting. So we're about in your final year of university at the minute. As in, like in the chronology of things. How do I navigate this? So you're finishing up at Nottingham? Did you then stay in Nottingham?

Emily Brady 35:43

No. So I wanted to do a masters. Because I, I kind of thought I want to do academia. But a lot of people I knew were kind of doing masters is a default. And I was a little bit worried that I was kind of doing it as like a putting off the real world. And also, I'd been in university for four years because of the year abroad. And I really wanted to get a chance to like see the rest of like, what what actually having a nine to five was like. So I left Nottingham, I moved back to Essex and moved in with my mum, and actually got a job in the hospital where my mum worked. And so it was a bit initially I was just supposed to be doing odd bits of admin while I found a better job. But then within the first month, I got like promoted up and up and up. By the end I was doing like HR stuff for it was a bit awkward, because by the end, I was on the same page and as my mum who'd been there for like years, and it was like oh. but during that time I did like no improv. Partially because I couldn't really afford to go into London and do it because there's not I don't quote me on this. But I think there's not much of an improv scene in Essex, I think it's kind of like, you just go to London if you want to do it. So there wasn't really an improv scene. And also I was kind of like I had, I'd had my university bubble and that was my understanding of it. And the idea of like, I'd look online, I'd look at like stuff with the nursery and hoopla and be like, I could just go. And I actually even like, set us I remember I set aside a few days where I was like, that's the Thursday I'm gonna go to the nursery drop in, and I just chickened out at the last minute. But it was, it was also because I was knackered from working and I was at the time, I did a lot of plays when I was an undergrad and one of them. We decided to take up too. We got selected for the Nottingham student drama festival. This was a play called the toy land murders and it was a puppet show. And we performed it. I was producing it, but it was performed at the National Student drama festival in Scarborough. And then we took it up to Edinburgh in the summer of 2016. I think that was. so I was like busy with a lot of other stuff like producing a show is hard, man. Especially when like 50% of your cast is inanimate objects. You have to make.

Richard Minkley 38:14

you'd think that make them more pliable. But

Emily Brady 38:16

oh man.

Richard Minkley 38:17

So hang on a minute. So Toyland murders was in 2016. Some of.

Emily Brady 38:22

so

Richard Minkley 38:22

ish. was this when you were the uni or when you were working at the hospital?

Emily Brady 38:25

Yeah. So

Richard Minkley 38:26

because this seems to be some overlapping here that I'm confused

Emily Brady 38:28

no, of course. So in 2015, my last year at university, Ben Hollands wrote and directed play called the Toyland murders, and I produced it. And that was in the performing arts studio at Trent building. In like, June 2015[?]. Yes, 2015, I want to say, and we got someone in from the Nottingham student from the National Student drama festival to watch it. Ben and I both, he'd done a masters. We both graduated. And then we got it got selected for the student drama festival. So we had to sort of go back to the university and rehearse it and take it to the festival. And around that time, we sort of decided, well, this is like, we think this is really good. We should take it to Edinburgh. So that's what we did in the summer of 2016. So I think that's partially the reason that I didn't do as much improv for a few years was because I had like other projects and stuff.

Richard Minkley 39:24

ok. So 2015 to 2016. And a little bit more at the end of 2016. You are I don't wanna say normal because that is a terribly derogatory

Emily Brady 39:38

[I'm] free

Richard Minkley 39:38

theres a derogatory kind of connotation to that but you're doing a nine to five you are having projects on the go. You're also not in Nottingham, so I imagine there's no contact with Missimp

Emily Brady 39:51

No, I mean, I still followed them on on Facebook and stuff and I was friends with a lot of people from Missimp on Facebook. But no, I Didn't really I popped back to Nottingham fairly regularly. But I didn't like go out of my way to see any Missimp shows. Or to like, at that point, I wasn't really like close friends with anyone who was heavily involved in Missimp aside from Ben and Amy, who'd also done quite a bit of stuff with Missimp

Richard Minkley 40:18

Is that Ben MacPhearson?

Emily Brady 40:20

Ben MacPhearson, yeah.

Richard Minkley 40:21

Amy

Emily Brady 40:21

Dickinson

Richard Minkley 40:22

Amy Dickinson

Emily Brady 40:22

now lives in Brighton.

Richard Minkley 40:23

Yeah. Okay. Um, okay, so what drew you back to Nottingham?

Emily Brady 40:29

I did a Master's. So I am. Yeah, I got funding to do a master's in American Studies. And it's so funny looking back now, because I'd kind of decided that improv was not, not that it wasn't for me, but that, like, I'd had my time with it. And it was great. And it's, I've made friends. And it's I did some really cool experiences. But it was like, time to crack on with my serious life. And then, and so I came back to Nottingham. And I thought about like, connecting with Missimp. Because I now felt like I was how old was I? I was about 21 years, this would have been 2016. So I would have been old. I would have been 23 or 22, 23, let's say. And yeah, I my plan, actually, when I came back to Nottingham, because a lot of my I was living with a friend. But a lot of my really close friends had left and moved on. And I was like, I need to find a way to like, make, connect with people and like make new friends. So my initial answer to that was I joined her campus Nottingham and became a reviewer of like shows at the Nottingham new theatre. Because my thinking was people would appreciate everyone It was a long standing thing that like reviews of shows tended not to be very good. And they were either just like, really blind praise, or they were really, really critical. And there was no middle ground and everyone everyone liked seeing the reviews and getting them and a lot of them were well written. But it was always like they were kind of treated a little bit like they weren't anything to be taken too seriously at this, at least this was how it felt to me back in the time I was in the new theatre. And I thought well, what if someone who used to do the new theatre but it's now slightly too old, like I felt a bit too old for it, when and use their experience to review the shows. And, and I did sort of like code it in kindness as much as I could. But I think in hindsight, you don't do student theatre to be given honest reviews of how you're doing what you do. It's just have a bit of fun and feel good about yourself. And I was definitely like, I kind of knew that at the time. And I did. I was as kind as possible. But there were a few looking back around like I didn't like it was the kind of climate where if you gave something three stars, people would be like, well, you hated it. So yeah, in hindsight, I think I kind of had a slightly inflated view of myself and my net impact on the theatre. But so I remember I was having a conversation, I think with Ben hollands where I sort of said, like, I've been thinking of doing stuff when going to like a Missimp drop in but I didn't know like I felt like improv was kind of something in my past and also had been out of it for so long that I couldn't quite see myself doing it again. But then I was I think I was and one of the pieces I wrote for her campus. One of the first things I wrote was a preview of the Nottingham Comedy Festival, specifically highlighting women in the festival. And so I was kind of like, oh, there's this comedy stuff going on in Nottingham. But then I, Ben was in a show and the show was, it was kind of put on for Lloydie's birthday. But it was a consenting partner show and it was upstairs at the Ned Ludd and the show that I can remember it being was two seats four cheeks were headlining, which is Lloydie and Jenny Rowe from the Mayday two prov

Richard Minkley 44:24

Okay,

Emily Brady 44:25

this this must have been in like November, or October 2016. And then the other two acts were atomic budgerigar, which is Nick and Marilyn's two prov and Ben MacPhearson And Liam Webber did a two prov of that was entirely like it was supposed to be like an anime. So it was entirely in like, like to gibberish. And like it was they did a thing about like a mushroom and like but they were just talking in like gibberish the whole time.

Richard Minkley 44:59

Like Pretending to be Japanese gibberish.

Emily Brady 45:01

I don't remember. You'd have to ask them about that. Because if so, woof. i don't i don't think it was like my recollection of it is that it was just like gibberish.

Richard Minkley 45:16

So this was Liam Webber and Ben MacPhearson.

Emily Brady 45:18

Yes.

Richard Minkley 45:18

Right. Okay.

Emily Brady 45:19

And they've never repeated since. glean from that what you will. But yeah, it was upstairs in the ned Ludd. And I remember seeing it and being like, and I remember I walked in the room. And in particular, Nick, Marilyn and Lloydie were just like, oh my god, it's so amazing to see you. And like, they were just so lovely and welcoming. And the funniest thing about that night, is that I watched the show, and I was like, Oh, my god, that was so genuinely, like, really impressive. Like, all three of the acts were really different, really nice. And I started chatting to Marilyn. And I didn't realise this at the time, she'd obviously seen me doing like musical improv in the past. And I didn't realise this at the time, but rhymes against humanity was a house team. It had been a house team for about a year and two people who just left. So they were a little bit like, oh what are we going to do? And I came in and I said to Marilyn, like, I kind of want to, like it seems really nice, but like, I don't know if I'm really like, i've been not doing it for so long. And like and Marilyn since told me that in her brain, she was just like, Ah, so this woman has just walked in who I know can do musical improv when we've just lost two men from rhymes. Interesting. And she literally cornered me in the side room at the Ned Ludd upstairs for an hour. And we just chatted about like, how we'd been and it got more and more like she was just like, you should you should do improv, you should talk to Lloydie you should. And then at the end of the night, and everyone was she like marched me up to Lloydie. and was like, You remember Emily, she kind of wants to get back into musical improv and Lloydie was like, interesting. I'll message you. And then he messaged me like the next day. and was like, audition.

Richard Minkley 47:06

Just for the record. There was a very when they were described when when Emily was describing Marilyn marching her up, a Very serious look in her eyes like you're coming this way.

Emily Brady 47:16

Yeah. And so that was the first time I met a lot of the newer Missimp people like who weren't there when I first was there. So like, people like Liam, but it was the first time that I'd like reconnected with people like Nick and Marilyn and Lloydie for ages.

Richard Minkley 47:31

Yeah.

Emily Brady 47:32

And yeah, it was just like, really, really, I remember that night. So clearly. Because I was really shy about going. I think if Ben hadn't been performing, I might not have sought it out. But then I went and was just like, blown away by how good it was. But how like, I didn't know anyone and everyone was just so lovely straightaway. And like Jeanette, that was the first time I met people like Jeanette Bird Bradley as well. So yeah, it was just like, amazing. It was really nice.

Richard Minkley 48:02

That's fantastic. That is a wonderful part. This is the end of our first half of the interview, which is actually a delightful place to end it. So I'm just going to stop there. Actually, before I do, is there anything you want to say over this kind of like period of time that we've just gone over? You don't have to say yes, but if there's anything in your mind that you're like, well, maybe I shouldn't say this is there any thing we've skipped over or miss.

Emily Brady 48:24

No, I feel I feel like it's my understanding is quite patchy, because it was very much sort of like at that point. It was kind of the outsider's perspective of like a casual attendee of Missimp shows rather than like, Yeah, what I am now.

Richard Minkley 48:39

What i've become

Emily Brady 48:40

What i've become

Richard Minkley 48:41

Okay, we'll leave that there. I'm gonna stop the thing.

b) Part 2 of 2

13th August 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

[due to how this interview was transcribed all as one audio file, the summary of keywords for the second part of the interview is included in the first.]

SPEAKERS

Emily Brady, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 48:43

We're recording. It is now 1142 on the 13th of August 2020, Richard Minkley interviewing Emily Brady, for the Missimp oral history pod podcast. It's not a podcast, it's a project.

Emily Brady 48:57

project.

Richard Minkley 48:57

The podcast is after its anyway. So to break up the little bit, we just had a bit of a conversation about the experiences you've been describing in the previous interview, and how the idea of gender was in, I believe the way you described it was that the idea of gender was in your head, but you weren't sure when? Or we're kind of didn't know whether it was appropriate to talk about what

Emily Brady 49:31

what,

Richard Minkley 49:33

what were you thinking about with that?

Emily Brady 49:36

Well, it's hard it's hard to say because I do think that my identity as a woman and also I need to caveat that as a middle class white woman. It did really shaped my experience with improv, and, and to an extent Missimp in those sort of years we've talked about so far, and obviously since, but especially back when I first joined The improv society. I actually took part in a photo project a few years ago called the I'm tired project, which is where it was for exhibit that I curated with, I don't think the projects running anymore. But the idea was was that you got people who experienced microaggressions. And you take a picture of them with the microaggression painted on their back, like on their naked back, and you tell your experience of it. And I did one for this photo series. And it they're purely anonymous, so I'm kind of outing myself. But the one that I said was like, I'm tired of hearing that women can't be funny. Because it felt like my early years of experience with improv, were kind of painted through this gendered lens that's influenced a lot of what I've done since. So the society was itself quite gender

diverse. Like I'd say, the society itself was maybe like a third women. But the troupes and the like, directorial teams tended to be a bit more of a either an equal split, or by the time we went to the fringe, like there were more women than men. But a lot of the social element of it was, in hindsight, not all of it and not not everyone. And even the people who were weren't all the time, but there was quite a lot of misogyny to it. So for instance, someone I got insinuated that I got in the troupe, because I'd flirted with the troupe director, and let him believe that he could sleep with me. I started dating someone in the improv society, and then found out that people had been placing bets on who I was going to date. The big one, and the person who did this has since apologised was that I was from Essex, and the amount of Essex girl jokes I got was so bad that we got thrown off of URN during a student radio show.

Richard Minkley 52:00

wow

Emily Brady 52:01

Yeah, the it was it was awful. And at the time, I sort of took it with a like, pinch of Oh, you know, well, I'm one of the lads, it's fine. But it did like really, in hindsight, I think it affected my attitude to improv quite a bit, because it wasn't. I always felt like my sexuality, and my identity as a woman was making me vulnerable. And I don't mean that quite so much onstage, but it was more offstage. I think a lot of that has to do with, you know, the the age of people and the society at the time was quite like, you got a lot of people who are suddenly getting to do what they love for the first time and then meeting like minded people. And it does get like, very complicated, and there's all those social elements that do get quite complex. But those first few years of doing improv, and I think as well, some of the ways that the male performers were treated compared to the female performers. Like I was, there was situations outside of the society, like I did a workshop in London with a group that now doesn't exist. And I got put into an incredibly uncomfortable sexual sexual situation when I was about 18. And I, in my head, I was like, well, I've got a yes. And I've got a yes and it.

Richard Minkley 53:19

in a scene or

Emily Brady 53:20

in a scene. Yeah. And thankfully, the guy who was running the workshop, after probably too long was like, maybe we shouldn't like force, the 18 year old, who's here for the first time to do this. But like a lot of experiences, experiences like that kind of shaped my understanding of improv in ways that I don't think I fully appreciated at the time. And also a kind of need to say like, at the time, you'd go and see Missimp, and Marilyn would be the only woman on stage. And obviously, she was fantastic. And she held her own and was brilliant. But it was like to look out from the outside, when you were already kind of grappling with these issues, it seemed like a very male, heavy organisation. And coupled to that, I had a few experiences in the bar after shows with people with with one person in particular, who is now no longer a member of Missimp because he was roundly kicked out. But like he thought this, this individual would often corner me after shows and asked me to be in adult movies. And it was it was awful. And it really put me off going to Missimp shows. I have a very clear memory of one of my of my male friends. I sort of said like, Look, can you just if we go to this Missimp show, can you just stick by me the whole time and tell him to leave if he comes over because I I don't feel comfortable telling him to get away from me. And he stood by my side the whole evening until he saw another friend of it on the other side. And then as soon as he was gone, this guy came over and was like, do you want to be

in this movie where you're like a living doll? I was like, No, thank you. But of course like now i'd tell them Fuck off. Can I swear?

Richard Minkley 55:02

I think you just did. Yeah, it's fine.

Emily Brady 55:03

But at the time, like I was a lot, as I said, I was like, self esteem issues and young and I was just like I don't know how to deal with this. So that also, to be honest, kind of put me off, like going to any Missimp things because I thought, Oh my God, this, this man's gonna be there. But by the time like I sort of came back, I think a lot of people in Missimp weren't aware that this was happening. And then it kind of came out with some with another person. And this person was the man in question was roundly told to leave and never come back, and has not been back since. So it was all fine. But I think a lot of what I've done or tried to do in subsequent years has been a result of that kind of environment, I first started to do improv with. Like, it was very hard when you're sort of 18 and getting a lot of like male attention for the first time to see it as problematic and damaging. And it wasn't until I was a few more years mature that I sort of looked back and was like, oh, oh, there was a lot of stuff going on. Yeah, and I've tried to turn that into something positive and like, make, like a try and advocate more for women in improv, although it must I again, I need to caveat, this is my perspective as like a white middle class woman. So there's obvious limitations to that.

Richard Minkley 56:39

So I have a particular question I would like to ask, but I'm going to add some context to it as well. Because not only my way that we've just recap some of the stuff we've already talked about, but with different perspectives and different information. I'm aware that by asking you about gender, it's brought this stuff out. And also, I'm aware that in other interviews I've done, especially with men, the question of gender hasn't necessarily come about. So the question, I'm wondering to add a bit more context to how this kind of issue and this factor of people's lives affect their recollections and how they talk about them is, why did you feel Why was it that you found yourself not talking about those stuff while we were going over your past experiences? And I don't mean that. I don't mean like, how dare you keep these secrets from me? I mean, like, what was the process of you holding back?

Emily Brady 57:40

No, I think it's definitely compartmentalised in my brain, I think I, because at the time, those memories, for me, are really genuinely happy, like my seeing those Missimp shows and hanging out in the bar afterwards, insinuating that Nick and Marilyn should be getting married. And like going to Edinburgh and doing the new theatre shows and like even some of those that rehearsal in London, like I had a lovely weekend outside of that one isolated event. And I think at the time, I sort of went, well, that's, that's happened. And I'm just going to forget it. So when I sort of look back on that time to myself, I kind of view those, those gender issues I encountered as separate, which I'm trying not to do, like, I'm trying to look back on it and see it more as like, a time that was really nice, but also had problematic shades rather than just a really nice time. And over here in this separate part of my brain is what was problematic stuff. But like, when I talk about it, that's kind of the way that I I view it like, and of course, that's bad, because it wasn't separate, like all of those events were inextricably, is that the word, like very closely linked. And I shouldn't be like that's this and this is that. But I think

Richard Minkley 59:00

they're not mutually exclusive. Is that the word. because you were going to say irreconcilable.

Emily Brady 59:05

That was it. Yeah,

Richard Minkley 59:05

that the word?

Emily Brady 59:06

Yeah, like and they should, they should be like, I should be able to look at these this past as a whole and say, Oh, this was what was good. And this was what was bad. But I think when it comes to like, my looking back on those events, I do tend to keep them quite separate. Like it's I don't want to taint those happy memories with the shady underbelly for what was going on at the same time. And, and also like I think that's kind of a bit of a survival mechanism, like I think, if you to link it back to bluntly, would like I don't know, really sort of taint my view of some of those quite nice memories. So that's probably like, why I've presented it this way rather than going oh, by the way while this was going on.

Richard Minkley 59:54

Yeah. And I really appreciate you kind of sharing this stuff and talking about the sort of Awkward, difficult nature of it the door bells going off in the background, it's like a brief interlude at least some tension.

Emily Brady 1:00:14

It's nice to talk about, like it is it's quite cathartic to talk about, and I've been quite open with it on other platforms. I do think one thing that's quite important, and I don't want to excuse anyone, but like, pretty much everyone who I had bad experiences in the past has is either like, no longer part of any organization's or have since like, matured and emailed like message me to apologise. And like,

Richard Minkley 1:00:46

suddenly getting very busy outside. But yeah, you were saying they've emailed to apologise?

Emily Brady 1:00:49

Yeah. So for instance, the person who did the radio show that got kicked off the air. Like has since apologised, and I know that like this was when everyone was 18/19. At university for the first time. I'm not saying that's an excuse. But I think people are capable of change. And so I think I'm sort of reluctant to say, oh, like, this is this person, and I must, I must name and shame them. Like, I think also, I probably did things in hindsight that were like not, not some of those first improv scenes you do when you're figuring out how it works, man, and you just look back and you're like, Why? Why did ? Why have you made that character, your brother when you're sitting on his lap? Like why Emily, why have you done that? stop. Thats a literal thing I did.

Richard Minkley 1:01:37

So that's actually quite an interesting way to kind of weave it back in, I suppose is like, these experiences you've described are quite often social. So for example, people talking in the bar, being in relationships and being in things, how was that world? I was gonna say, presented as if you were like, I'm going to put this out on stage now. But like, how was that experience in the improv you were doing? And will, this is really tricky. It would have been more sensible to talk about this at the end, when we have like a big broader view of it. However, I thought it was important to recognise that.

Emily Brady 1:02:16

Yeah

Richard Minkley 1:02:17

because actually, no, here is a good question. So we're in a point where you've come back to Nottingham, you've done the Jam for Lloydie's birthday, and Marilyn has just marched you over to Lloydie to be like, this person wants to be in your troupe. Did you have this perspective, then? Or will you still decompartmentalising it much more at that point?

Emily Brady 1:02:41

Oh, yeah. No, yeah, there was definitely like, I think I was more aware of it than I had been. Particularly because like, I think when you're friends with, and you're in a very close social environment with people, you excuse or downplay your own feelings. And then when I wasn't, you could not, like in like a horrible, but when you leave University, there are some people you stay friends with, and some you don't. When I was out of that environment, I'd sort of reflected and been like, Oh, that was not the golden, shiny time of my life. It was still, I had a really lot of lovely experiences. But I was able to sort of think a bit more critically about it. And I've got to say, I think I was still at the point where I was aware that these issues had happened, but I wasn't able to articulate them in quite the same way. But I did get a real sense when I went to that event, the Missimp event that things had, like, there were more women in the room. Like, I think Marilyn may have been the only performer that I remember, there might have been another team, but I can't quite recall. But there was like, just the environment. I think maybe because the performance was sitting like right in front of you. And the kind of welcome I got when I went in it just the atmosphere. That had always been like, all right, aside from that one, that, like it just really put me at ease. And also, I do think maybe this is a bad thing to admit. But, being able to join rhymes did kind of make me feel like I had a place and that I could like, do things in the wider community. So after Marilyn, I keep saying Marian like frogmarched me I was also like, Hey, Lloydie How's it going? Hey,

Richard Minkley 1:04:31

Marilyn, held you at gun point and marched you.

Emily Brady 1:04:34

Yeah. So Lloydie messaged me like a couple of days later, and said, we're having rehearsal on Tuesday. There's another guy as well, who's gonna be auditioning. Why don't you just come along and we'll do some scenes and see what happens. I thought I was going to be sick in my mouth. I was so I was the most nervous I'd ever be because I think I'd sort of gone improves my past I'm not going to get back into it. And then such There was a chance I could get back into it doing exactly the kind of stuff that I loved, like the musical stuff. And I was like, This is too good to be true. I'm gonna, I'm gonna mess it up. And I very nearly did. I went to the [auditi] audition rehearsal and it was downstairs at the Nottingham, it was at the actors studio, which used to run,

Richard Minkley 1:05:20

The actors studio, okay.

Emily Brady 1:05:23

Because I think that's where a few a few of the rehearsals were happening at the time. Also, that was the time where Rhymes was rehearsing at the malt cross. So this was the malt cross era. But we just did like a load of, as I said, scenes into songs and like, group numbers. And I remember, Martin was

there, Jeanette was there, Phil was there. The other person who was auditioning was Pete cliff. He was in rhymes for a couple of years. I think in our lives in Manchester, with his beautiful wife and adorable baby and wonderful dog.

Richard Minkley 1:06:02

I don't I don't necessarily want to explain this now. But is it What was it? Pete? Cliff? Pete Cliff? Is that "Anneka Rice"?

Emily Brady 1:06:09

Yes, that's "Anneka Rice".

Richard Minkley 1:06:10

Thats "Anneka Rice" I'm not gonna explain that. Moving on.

Emily Brady 1:06:13

Um, but yeah, so he was he was auditioning as well. And he was phenomenal. He was like a, He was incredible. And I remember being like, Oh, no, well, that's I'm not getting in. Like, if this guy is there, like there's no way I'm getting in. And, and also, I think, when people would said to me in the past that the reason you got into this troupe was because you were female, which happened in my first year that had kind of like, I don't know, I was I was thinking, I was in my own head a bit thinking like, well, if I get in, it's only because I'm a woman. And like, this guy is so much better than me. What if he doesn't get in because I got in, but I'm not as good. Which is in hindsight nonsense, but it's kind of where my brain was, at the time. And, and the thing I always remember about that, or audition rehearsal, was that there was a scene into a song and it was quite structured at the time where it was like two people did reverse, and then you'd come from the backline and do a chorus. And I hadn't done anything in a moment. And I was like, I need to do something. And I had nothing in my head. And it was about hypnotist. I came out and I was like, I'm under your spell. I'm under your spell. It's not magic, but Oh, well. I'm under your spell and was like, that great. Like, where did that come from? It turns out it came from Buffy the Vampire Slayer. And I'd completely ripped off a song from because I've not I've not seen the whole episode. But I'd heard the songs like, in my life,

Richard Minkley 1:07:44

Is that the musical episode of Buffy.

Emily Brady 1:07:45

Yes.

Richard Minkley 1:07:46

Oh my days.

Emily Brady 1:07:47

And my biggest saving grace at that audition was that Liam Webber was not in the room. Because he would have 100% gone Excuse me. You Owe that man who wrote Buffy money. Whats his name? Joss Whedon, you need to pay more royalties. But so we did the audition. And I think I even as I was singing the verse, the chorus again, I was like, Oh, this, this ain't mine. But even no one noticed or no one called me out. And we went to the pub afterwards. We went to Oh, that really nice pub that does a nice roasts can't remember the name of

Richard Minkley 1:08:26

Okay,

Emily Brady 1:08:27

near the Actor's Studio.

Richard Minkley 1:08:28

Oh my god, it's not Kean's head is it?

Emily Brady 1:08:31

Yes.

Richard Minkley 1:08:32

Kean's head is a marvelous place

Emily Brady 1:08:33

Kean's head and Lloydie and Sam Plummer, who was the musician went off to have a conversation. I remember sitting there I think I was sat opposite Martin. And I was just like, My hand was shaking. Doing it again, in the audition made me realise how much I love doing it. And I was like, what if I, like you, and you start trying to game the, you're like, well, if he gets in then does that mean I don't get in, and then they were both like so, Do you guys want to come to rehearsal next week? And I like, on the outside. I was like, Yeah, that would be acceptable. And on the inside, I was just like, AAAAAAUGH!

Richard Minkley 1:09:09

I love it.

Emily Brady 1:09:11

I spent all week listening to musical theatre songs in like prep. I was just like, it was so it was and yeah, so then I I started rehearsing with rhymes. This must have been in like November 2016. I will say it took me a really long time to start going to Thursday drop-ins that were at the malt cross at the time. Because I just felt like I wasn't good enough. Like I didn't have I hadn't been doing improv in so long. I didn't have the like, I didn't have the confidence like get up on stage and do something in front of people. I remember it took me like two or three months to go to my first gorilla burger. And I did not get on stage. The entire time I just watched and then next month I went back and so this must have been like, [technical issue] sorry.

Richard Minkley 1:10:02

Scared the life out of me.

Emily Brady 1:10:03

This must have been like April 2017. When I finally went, No, maybe maybe earlier, maybe like March 2017, when I finally went to a gorilla burger, and I remember, I didn't get up for the first half. But by the second half, I was like, I've had enough. Like, I've had a glass of wine, I can do this. And then it was like, once I'd done it, it was absolutely fine. And I started going to like drop-ins on the reg and gorilla burger stuff. So yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:10:33

that's interesting, because we've basically talked about the last six years.

Emily Brady 1:10:38

Yes,

Richard Minkley 1:10:39

of a relationship with Missimp. But you never really got involved.

Emily Brady 1:10:45

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:10:45

but then you went to see them and you knew the people. But then you went to a heather and joe and stuff like that. But then there was, you were drawn in to rhymes. And then, was it that you would have tried some drop-ins anyway, if you hadn't got in or was, did rhymes lead to the drop-ins and the drop-ins then grew from there.

Emily Brady 1:11:07

I would say at the time, it was definitely the rhymes that drove me into the rest of Missimp. Because I needed that like, confidence of something to hook me in. Like something to say like, Oh, you are, which, in hindsight, like anyone can do improv its spine like, like, you've got people at Missimp, who are doing it for their first time. But at the time, I really felt like I had to be able to hold like my own in the room. And I didn't think I could do that. So I think I genuinely don't know if the if I hadn't had my opportunity with rhymes. Like what would have happened, I think I would have eventually found my way to it. But it wouldn't have happened. At the rate it did if it wasn't for me getting into rhymes

Richard Minkley 1:11:54

I see.

Emily Brady 1:11:54

And what was quite nice about rhymes as well was that it was quite familiar to me because we had a show at the Nottingham Playhouse in I think January or February of 2017? So I joined rhymes in like November 2016. And then there was a big it was the first Playhouse show

Richard Minkley 1:12:14

The first PlayHouse show.

Emily Brady 1:12:15

I think it was the first one. And it was like a big deal. And so I remember like, it was nice to have something to work towards. Like that was very much the like, right now we're working on this, we've got this structure, we're doing this. And it was great. Like it was it was those that was such a like great time to be in rhymes and like, because you had Yeah, Pete and every, like it was just really lovely. And I kind of got that magic back again, like that open field running feeling. One of my favourite memories of rehearsing with Rhymes downstairs at the malt cross during that time. We did some great runs, and we did some awful runs. But my absolute favourite moment that I could still see so clearly is, you get lost in the magic of the world you're creating. And I remember very clearly, Liam was playing a normal sized man and Martin was playing a giant. And he said, because of the magic of improv, like you start when you're acting with it, you start seeing them, like you see the height difference, and you get it. And they were basically falling in love. And someone else was singing and Martin mind to Liam

to like, climb onto his hand and use. You see it you see a tiny Liam climb onto Martins hand, and then he sits down, and you're watching and someone's singing. And then all of a sudden we start we're on the sidelines and we suddenly go, I'm looking at this I'm like, martin has just got his hand Cupping Liam's arse. And it took us like two minutes to be, because we've all just like, Yeah, he's holding him in his hand. Its beautiful. Wait. And then Liam and Martin realised, And martin was so gently like. Yeah, and it was great. And around. We at that point we were doing shows that the actors studio, they weren't always Rhymes shows, but maybe like, every, I think we're doing one maybe once a month, every sort of two months, and every other one tended to be a rhymes show. And around that point, Sam Marshall became a musician for Brian's as well. But yeah, no, so that was I I sort of carried on doing stuff with rhymes for a bit and then I got more and more into doing stuff with like, the Missimp community so like, going to drop-ins I think a big part of that was just becoming better friends with everyone as well. Because I think it was around that time that Vox auditioned. I think that was about a year after Rhymes I'm not sure 100% but like I remember seeing those auditions and being like interesting, but I was already in rhyme's and at the time I thought like so it's it's a bit much but I'm very glad I did because now look at vox, Look at you, look at the world

Richard Minkley 1:15:01

Don't make look at vox.

Emily Brady 1:15:06

But yeah, and this is where my timeline starts to get a little bit like, not buggy, but like I remember it was around when I joined Missimp that smash night started.

Richard Minkley 1:15:17

Right.

Emily Brady 1:15:19

And that was like Liam spearheading that with the angel. I actually think it was probably the, maybe that summer. or like, April time that the first one was, but I can't remember clearly

Richard Minkley 1:15:32

April 2017, or April 2018

Emily Brady 1:15:35

2017, because I wasn't on the exact when it started.

Richard Minkley 1:15:38

I see. So it was the first smash night you mean? I'm sorry I'm,

Emily Brady 1:15:44

I think I'm confusing myself.

Richard Minkley 1:15:45

I'm confused. You're confused. We're all confused. I have questions. So we're just talking about the first Playhouse. We've got so many things to talk about

Emily Brady 1:15:54

oh yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:15:54

we've been skipping all over.

Emily Brady 1:15:56

sorry.

Richard Minkley 1:15:58

The first Playhouse show. Do you remember what the the that was? Remember the lineup and what you did?

Emily Brady 1:16:04

Yeah, I Remember. No, it was good. It was good. I. Again, it was a show where I accidentally made quite a questionable choice in hindsight.

Richard Minkley 1:16:12

Oh, and you did it publicly as well.

[-]

Emily Brady 1:17:01

Yeah. But it was. It was one of those shows that I think it was, it was just at the time, it was just magic. Like it was fantastic. And I think I remember a lot of people who saw it being like, oh my god, that was really good. And I think by like rhymes standards, now if that if we had that show, we'd be like, yeah, it was it was good. It was fine. But at the time, we were like, Oh my god, we've touched the face of the Lord. It was great. And like it was such a brilliant experience. And yes, actually, I remember the next Playhouse show was in like, in May or June and it was a Star Wars Show. Because I was not in Star Wars at that point. And I, so I compensated by getting very drunk, falling asleep on the stairs.

Richard Minkley 1:17:53

aww.

Emily Brady 1:17:54

but yes, so that was the January February Playhouse show that year, it was the Ryan show where I played Beyonce. Which. Oh past, Emily,

Richard Minkley 1:18:06

Oh past Emily. So that's one thing. So you said. I think you said about April 2017, you went to your first gorilla burger. And you described it as kind of getting more involved in the community?

Emily Brady 1:18:20

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:18:22

I'm interested because this is the first. there's been a couple of like, you mentioned when you went to the Glee Club, that they were making jokes with people in the audience, and there was something like a community there. At what point Did you become aware that there was this thing that was considered

a community? Like 2017? was it? Was it considered a community even like was it was it just the people and they didn't really have a name for it?

Emily Brady 1:18:47

Well, I think to be honest, the the time I first realised there was a community was at the workshops, the drop-ins that I went to the musical ones with Heather and Joe, because it was the first time I saw people who weren't on stage, but were still part of the community. So like, they weren't the people who got to go on stage at the Glee Club. But they would like they were getting up and like doing stuff the drop in and being really, really good. So I think then was when I was like, oh, there's like, more to this organisation than just what you see on on the stage. And then by sort of, I think for me, it was a bit of a confidence thing. So to get into rhymes was a big boost to my confidence, but it took just a little more time for me to like, be what be ready to take the plunge into being full of like a room of people I didn't really know. And but yeah, when I when I did, it was great. And like, the good the really good thing actually, was that I didn't feel pressured to do anything. Like when I first time I went to gorilla burger like they weren't like, put your name in the hat like do it it was just like, I'm just gonna have the drink fine. They were like great like everything was met with The same level of enthusiasm. And I think as well, one thing I really wanted to avoid at the time was that when I was in the university teams, as I said, there was a bit of a divide between the people who were in the troupes and who weren't. And if you weren't in the troupes, you didn't really get to perform on stage. And it kind of got to the point where you didn't because you were spending so much time rehearsing for shows, you didn't go to the Sunday drop-ins as much because you were tired, and you've done improv, like four nights a week. And it kind of caused a bit of within the, at the time, in the improv society a bit of resentment, I think they're now they've got a really much better system in place where they kind of have different teams for different things. And they have shows where like anyone can perform, which is really good. But I was aware at the time, when I joined Rhymes, I didn't want to be like, Oh, I just perform with this one team. And then I never involve myself in the community stuff at all. Because I'd kind of accidentally done that before. And it didn't. Once I realised I'd done that I didn't feel great. So I started going to more Thursday stuff. And that was around the time that smash night started as well, which I think injected a lot more community, because it was suddenly like you didn't have to be. I think Glee by this point had well and truly ended. And so by this point, you didn't have to be in like a team to perform like you could be in the social club. I know that smash night was originally conceived to be a bit more of an experimental night than it ended up becoming. like it was supposed to be more of a scratch night like, you come up with a crazy team and you go on. But I think rhymes performed. If not at the first smash night at one of the first smash nights it might even have been the first one. That that was a show about cannibals being in love.

Richard Minkley 1:21:57

aww

Emily Brady 1:21:58

yeah. I just wanted Lloydie to eat me. But he wouldn't. And thus the musical occur.

Richard Minkley 1:22:05

I love that being Beyonce, oh questionable, wanting to be eaten. That's fine.

Emily Brady 1:22:10

We can all relate to that.

Richard Minkley 1:22:15

I'll come back to that another time. But yeah, so. So this is interesting. We really entering a new phase in your relationship with Missimp Here. You've said you were at gorilla burgers, was it? Because I know the system we have at the minute is like in a month, there'll be like one gorilla burger and all the other Thursday's would it be drop-ins. Would that be, was it working the same way then? And at the malt cross?

Emily Brady 1:22:42

Yep.

Richard Minkley 1:22:43

So is it basically that same?

Emily Brady 1:22:44

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:22:45

that format

Emily Brady 1:22:45

that stayed the same. Pretty much the. as far as I'm aware, by the time I started going, that was very much the setup.

Richard Minkley 1:22:51

So did you start going to the drop-ins after this gorilla burger, then?

Emily Brady 1:22:54

Yes. Not with the same I still went to probably like one drop in a month. And then most gorilla burgers I went to

Richard Minkley 1:23:01

Yeah.

Emily Brady 1:23:02

That did pick up as I became more, as we'll talk about in a bit when I became like an exec member. But at the time, yes. Like it was kind of operating on that as far as I'm aware. And then yes, so smashed night came about upstairs at the angel. And I went to every single one of those. I think I missed one in the entire time that it was happening. Hopefully it will come back but who knows. But yeah, and it was originally envisioned i think is a lot more of a, as I said, like a scratch night and experimental night. But it became so, to begin with, it was such a good show. Like it got into the habit of instead of having the experimental stuff, you sort of had like one Missimp team. In whatever stage that meant. You had one outside Nottingham act, or outside Missimp act i should say, like we had the university lot come a few times, which was such a nice full circle moment.

Richard Minkley 1:24:02

aww.

Emily Brady 1:24:02

and then you had smash night Social Club, which was just pretty much whoever wanted to perform, could get up on stage and join a team and perform. And I loved I loved the social clubs so much. It was I think I went through a few months where I was in a lot of smash nights and I had to reel it back a bit because I didn't want to like monopolise it. But I was in the rhymes show there, as I said, and then there was a few smash nights. One of the first ones I remember of the smash night social club was that I played fire, which just meant that I would put my hand out and like move my fingers really, really, really fast. And I did it and Nick saw me do it and was like, well I'm getting you to do that in every scene that you're in.

Richard Minkley 1:24:48

I feel like I remember this. I might have seen that.

Emily Brady 1:24:50

Yeah, there's a picture of it on the Missimp Facebook page and my fingers are just a very satisfying blur, which is like, Oh my god, it actually kind of looked how I wanted it to look for once. Because sometimes you see pictures of improv shows and you're like, man, I thought I was being such a good octopus, but, I just look like a twat.

Richard Minkley 1:25:07

And I for some reason, this is a little bit of a sidetrack. But there's a lot of scenes when I first started coming to smash night of people being born and birthed, and coming out of each other, like that.

Emily Brady 1:25:18

Yeah. Yes. And I think was that when this is where I get a bit confused, because well, there was also a Nottingham Comedy Festival we had at the angel that was ran by Katie.

Richard Minkley 1:25:31

Yes. This is Katie Mitchell.

Emily Brady 1:25:34

Yes. I think that was that year as well. This was. Yes. So that was I, yes so, guess I'll get to that in a minute. But So currently, we're at like, April, May, this year.

Richard Minkley 1:25:44

Yeah. Well, we coming we've got about 10 minutes left.

Emily Brady 1:25:49

no.

Richard Minkley 1:25:49

Yeah, I know, Were no where near done. You have no idea, mate? So

Emily Brady 1:25:58

Well, i'll tell you, the, cause. There's quite a good ending point coming up. If I continue briefly,

Richard Minkley 1:26:02

I love how sometimes life gives you a bit of narrative. What,

Emily Brady 1:26:05

yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:26:05

What

Emily Brady 1:26:05

because I went to the

Richard Minkley 1:26:06

lead me

Emily Brady 1:26:07

Edinburgh Fringe that year, as like, I can't remember why i went. I think at this point, I was dating Liam, and he was the troupe, That was I think, I think I'm right. He was the troupe director. or something. Maybe he was. No, he was. Yes, he was doing, he was doing a venue at Edinburgh, with his friends, Jed and Joe. And I went up to visit him. And just just as like a punter, and it was so nice. But I met and sat with the Maydays after one of their shows. And one of the Maydays. Oh, no, what's his name? The one who likes to fish. I'll have to edit this. You'll have to edit this.

Richard Minkley 1:26:50

And really hope there's a there's clearly a prominent fisher. Like, you look at the group photo, and it's like, why is that guy wearing like dungarees and a hat?

Emily Brady 1:26:58

Yeah, he's like the, he such an amazing, nice man. We were talking. And I'd sort of been toying with the idea for a while because that rhymes was a team and what Ben had just set up Vox and I was like, you can do that. And I thought how cool it would be to have an all female team. So I was chatting to the Maydays about this, and they were just like, you should 100% do this. This sounds like a great idea. So I was sort of thinking about it. When I was in Edinburgh, I saw loads of improv and I started thinking, well, like, I could maybe direct a team as well. And it could be all women, and it would be a Harold team. And duh duh duh duh duh. so when I came back from Edinburgh, I decided that I think I did, I made two decisions. The first was that I was going to start my own improv podcast, which I still have, improv treehouse, its currently on a break due to the horrific nature of the pandemic.

Richard Minkley 1:27:58

Yeah, I was gonna say a little little caveat we are in August, after February when COVID-19 pandemic happened.

Emily Brady 1:28:07

Yes. So that's paused for a brief while. And also, I decided that I was going to try and start an all female team.

Richard Minkley 1:28:16

That's interesting, because there's two, two parts there. There's one, which is this sense of like, contributing a podcast and like, doing this, interviewing people putting stuff out there. And there's also another thing where there's like a leadership role. You're forming something, you're setting something up.

Emily Brady 1:28:31

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:28:33

That may become more prominent looking forward. But looking back over this life that you, we've just been over over the last hour or two. Do you see any particular points that led up to that sense of leadership or of I don't want to say codifying, but like catching and wrapping up and packaging this lifestyle that people have.

Emily Brady 1:28:58

I think in everything I've done up until that point, I'd always been the supportive player. So I produced the show at Edinburgh, I'd been the social secretary at the university. And I didn't really have enough faith in myself to like, say, No, I'm going to like lead something. I'm going to try and take like creative control of something. And I think by that point, I'd gained enough confidence that I thought that was the natural next step. And actually, in particular, with the podcast, because originally I thought, well, I'll make I'll restart the Missimp podcast that I mentioned, because that had such a big impact on me. You know, when they mentioned me, I was like, that was such a galvanizing moment for me. And I was like, I'd love to do that for someone else. And then I sort of thought about it and I thought, wow, this is quite like bad, but if I thought I thought if I made it the Missimp podcast, then I felt like everything would be run through committee, and I'd always kind of have to make sure that I was doing it the right way. And it wouldn't just it wouldn't be my project, it would be Missimp project. And I thought about it and I thought, you know what, like, no, I've spent like, all of my so far with improv has been like, following someone else or being directed by someone else. And that's been great. But I really felt like it was time to try and start something that was mine. So, obviously, like the, the troupe that would become the vortex was part of Missimp. But the improv treehouse podcast that came out of it was like, that's like that was mine. And that felt like quite a big deal to me at the time to be like, nope, this is this is my thing. This is my doing. And then to take the lead on trying to start a team as well was like quite a big deal for me at the time. And yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:30:48

that's fantastic. Okay, so we're almost at the end. But I've got one last question, which is, this is a question that I'm asking everyone. Because, and the answer may change when we talk about the next chapter in your life with Missimp. But for the thing we're looking at at the minute, why did you keep coming back to do improv? Why did you keep because to be sure, there's lots of people who try it once and go, that was fun, and then never do it again. But there's a lot of people who come and then keep turning up. Sorry, I said, they come. And now you're smiling. And now I'm smiling. I we've spent 42 minutes being normal, and This is going on record forever. Look, some people come and then they just keep coming

Emily Brady 1:31:34

yeah, and can't stop coming.

Richard Minkley 1:31:37

Why did you keep coming? Why did you keep doing improv?

Emily Brady 1:31:42

Yes. I think once I got the, I think I was always chasing that high. And I'm still chasing that high. Like, I think when you first I think there are people who do improv and they enjoy it, and it's fine, and it's fun. And then I think you get sometimes with people, they get it and then they have that moment that's like, Oh my god, this is magic. This is incredible. And I was obsessed with improv. As a teenager, like, I watched Whose Line is it Anyway, all the time. I had a Colin Mochrie t shirt. And yes, and I used to wear a badge in my school uniform that had Colin Mochrie and Ryan Stiles on it. Yes.

Richard Minkley 1:32:26

Oh,

Emily Brady 1:32:26

such a nerd. So I think I always knew that I'd love it even from like before I could ever even think about doing it. Because I love attention. Fundamentally, no, I, I love being on stage. I love being I love like collaborating in the moment with people. I don't think you get that as part of any other art form. I love the sensation of being the writer and the director and the actor all at the same time. And I think what keeps me coming back is that high moment when everything works. And you're just I think when I when a show is going really well I can see it I can see the world and I don't see you know, Richard Minkley standing in front of me I see like, you know, the pirate captain Lord or whatever. And it's part of the reason just as a side note why I didn't think I'd enjoy online improv for the longest time when obviously with the shift to online, and I'm still a little bit wary of it. But I did two shows. One with Jay Suco in LA and one with rhymes and it was just that magic again. Where Because you're not focusing on anything else. You're just focusing on to see the world. like you stopped seeing like, you know, you stop seeing Sam Marshall, the improviser, you see Sam Marshall, the trash Goblin. his alter ego. Yeah. And I think

Richard Minkley 1:33:55

for the record, he isn't he doesn't have an alter ego as a trash Goblin. Or maybe he does. I don't know.

Emily Brady 1:33:59

Yeah, I think that's what keeps me coming back to improv. It's not just the fact that it's you on stage, having a great time. It's the fact that you're there with someone else. And both of you in the moment are like working together. And I think that's why the idea of I keep coming back to the idea of community in Missimp. Because like, I think improv is by its in its very, very cool nature is a communal art form. Even if you're doing solo improv, you're going off of what the audience says, like, or the reaction that you're kind of getting from yourself a minute later, almost like you're constantly editing and evolving. And I think that it's a very that's a very communal thing. So yeah, that's why I keep coming back because, I'm a whore for attention. And I love people.

Richard Minkley 1:34:46

I know is a very complicated way of saying cuz I'm fucking love it.

Emily Brady 1:33:50

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:34:50

But yeah, fantastic. That's our time for this first

Emily Brady 1:34:54

Well, we're nearly at the point where we are joined the exec and nothing happens then.

Richard Minkley 1:34:59

No,

Emily Brady 1:35:00

So, its like

Richard Minkley 1:35:00

to be honest, I found that 2016 onwards at the malt cross things just kind of dwindled down.

Emily Brady 1:35:04

Yeah, it was really quiet.

Richard Minkley 1:35:05

That's not true. I'm gonna stop this before. We

9.2. Interview 2 of 2

a) Part 1 of 2

17th September 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, exec, improv, community, nottingham, vortex, team, audience, interesting, female, organisation, bit, joined, events, organising, shows, feel, audition, question, remember

SPEAKERS

Emily Brady, Richard Minkley

Richard Minkley 00:00

So we are recording over here. And we are also recording over here. Great. So it is for the record 10, 12 minutes past 10 on Thursday, the 17th of September. It's Richard Minkley interviewing Emily Brady for the Missimp oral history podcast, not podcast. I need to stop calling it a podcast. It's an oral history project. And we're going to put my phone on, do not disturb and stuff. And we're in Hello. To begin with, and we'll just recap something you said to me before we started recording that you have the events listed on Facebook up to help you remember what actually happened when and things like that. Is that correct?

Emily Brady 00:41

Yes, Yes. Because unlike the last interview, when we were beholding each other in real life, now we're on zoom. So beforehand, like I think my improv life balance, excuse me, was like reasonable. And then we're entering the period where it becomes very, very, like, most nights a week I was doing something with Missimp or rhymes against humanity. So it's just easy. I've got Facebook, like and I've got the list of all the events Missimp has done just as like a sort of refresher. Because there was a lot of it kind of went from there being you know, maybe two events a month to there being like, one event a week, and like not including, you know, drop-ins or stuff like that. So, yeah. refresher.

Richard Minkley 01:37

This is interesting, because you actually brought us to a nice conclusion in the last interview where you described how you were

Emily Brady 01:47

I'm so sorry, by the way, I live right near like, dispatch place for ambulances, police and fire stations. So its.

Richard Minkley 01:54

Well this is it though. I'm not too far away from that. So people might hear the call, like going past yours and then round the corner round me so but you were at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, you

talked to some people from the maydays and you decided to do two things. One was start an improv podcast, and one was start an all female improv team here in Nottingham.

Emily Brady 02:20

JOHN Kramer, by the way,

Richard Minkley 02:22

john Kramer.

Emily Brady 02:23

In the last interview, I said that one of the Maydays in particular was very like you should do it. And that was john Kramer and I couldn't remember his name, or the only thing I can remember was that he was into fishing.

Richard Minkley 02:33

Yeah,

Emily Brady 02:33

and that's a horrible thing. So that's the only if that's the only thing you'd remember about someone you're not a good person.

Richard Minkley 02:38

Yeah, it does make it sound like he's like really into fishing. But yeah, so I suppose to begin with, then you just said that you well you previously said that you wanted to start these two things? Did you just come home from the Edinburgh Festival? And it was like, bam, and you kind of hit the road running? or How long did it take for those ideas to start happening? Do you think?

Emily Brady 03:10

Um, that is a very good question. I actually can't remember when my first episode of improv treehouse was that's, that's my podcast,

Richard Minkley 03:18

you've done a few.

Emily Brady 03:20

Yeah, so I've done. I believe at this point. I've done two seasons of 12 episodes each. And I kind of want to look at when it actually started, is that rude?

Richard Minkley 03:32

Well you can do. But remember, I be able to look up afterwards when you first uploaded it. But I'm kind of interested in the experience and the process of starting it. So was it like I was saying, did you just come in and were like, I'm going to hit the ground running. And I'm just going to get it started and you moved quite quickly? Or did you have to work through some things first to kind of really get into it.

Emily Brady 03:55

So I just remembered so basically with the podcast, what happened was Austintatious, who are a group who do improvised Jane Austen.

Richard Minkley 04:03

Yeah.

Emily Brady 04:03

And they're one of the biggest teams in the UK. They were doing a tour. And they were performing at Lakeside. And I can't remember the exact date, but I do feel like it was around. I was in the fringe in August. Like just as a punter. And then this was either like September or October, like I remember it still being quiet, like nice weather. And basically, I was like, Oh, I want to do this podcast. So what I'll do is I'll keep an eye on when there are acts coming through Nottingham that I want to talk to. And also smash night was a very, very big factor in the podcast because you'd get people coming from all over the country. And it was like, I just got into a really good system with the organisers of being like can I use your room for an hour before the show to record with the act that's performing.

Richard Minkley 04:52

This was at the angel, wasn't it?

Emily Brady 04:54

That was at the angel, yeah. But the first recording was with Austentatious which was kind of a bit of a coup. Cuz I kind of messaged them and was like, I messaged quite a few teams and was like, Oh, this is all quiet like nothing's gonna happen. This is too ambitious, and then Austentatious, we're like, yes, we can do that like, and then Lakeside set me up in a room. And I didn't really know what I was doing for that first recording. I think I borrowed a lot of tech off of, I think I borrowed a few mics off of you. Well, you gave me a few mics. And then I had Nick and Marilyn's mic, and then I had a mic that Liam had lent me. And I just set them all up and was like, hopefully one of these will work. So it was kind of I think, if it hadn't been for that, I would have taken longer to like, research it and set it up. But it was like I had the chance to go with Austentatious, so I was like, well, and then the one thing I found with that first season was that I was really racing to catch up with myself, because I wanted to do it once a fortnight. And I just like, the pressure to get something and then edit it for that scale like for that to keep it consistent, was really difficult. And so from that point on for the second season, I basically didn't start until I had like, I try and do 12 episodes a season. And I didn't stop until I had, I didn't start until I had like 10 episodes in the bag. And just because it became unfeasible like it was the first season was like a real rush to get it. Like keep it consistent. And now obviously I am in the tricky in the interesting position at the moment in that I nearly had enough to start a third season. But a lot of it was recorded at IO which has since collapsed. So I don't really feel like I can use any of those recordings. And so yes, but I've also got recordings from people back from like November last year. So I will probably do a new season soon.

Richard Minkley 06:55

That's, that's interesting. One of the things I'm really picking up there is how you were talking about, you were really trying to catch up with yourself with this podcast project. And I'm sure we'll talk about the podcast in more depth as we go. But it seems that that was the state of your life at the time as well, because this is you just talked about how you were doing all of these podcasts and how it was a lot. You also started another improv team. So you went from being. In fact, let's do the maths a little bit. You just said that you came back from Edinburgh in August and you did this thing in September. How many things went off for you in that brief period after Edinburgh? So let's say the next couple of months or so. So what were you already doing? You were part of rhymes against humanity?

Emily Brady 07:47

Yes. And I also joined the exec around that time, because basically, I sort of said to everyone on the executive team, I'd like to start an all female team. And they had a conversation. They were basically like well if Emily wants to set up a team. Like we should probably like she should be on the exec. And she's like I was, I think I'd been doing some organising stuff at that point. And I was just like, super keen. So I was like, Yes, please.

Richard Minkley 08:12

Yeah. What's that for you organising about then.

Emily Brady 08:17

I'd started doing some drop-ins. I was about I think it was around that time that I signed up to teach my first course, which happened in November. And that was a level one course with Nick. And it was the best.

Richard Minkley 08:30

Yeah?

Emily Brady 08:31

Like me and Nick need to do two prov man, it was so fun.

Richard Minkley 08:35

Oh, that sounds great.

Emily Brady 08:38

Yeah, but it was it was more like I was very keen to be doing stuff. And I think I'd like i'd done the doors at a few events and things. And then when I sort of said like, Oh, yeah, I want to run this team. They were like, Okay. And also at the time, I don't know if anyone else has mentioned this. But there was talk about us getting a venue. This was I can't remember exactly when the conversation started happening. But it used to it used to be called the Actor's Studio. And basically it was changing. I can't remember if it was changing hands or if they were downsizing or what. But we were running a lot of events, a few events out there, like rhymes had a few shows there. And a few other things that we'll get to in a minute, we're there. And there was the opportunity that Missimp could have taken that on like themselves as a space. But I think actually when that discussion happened, it revealed how much we weren't ready for that and how that necessarily didn't fit our business model. And also the the space is great, but it wasn't accessible. Which especially, I think a few years ago, we kind of took for granted the need for Accessible space. And now it's like no you do. like if you're running events they need to be in an accessible space.

Richard Minkley 09:59

That's, again, very interesting and lots of stuff to come back to. We're basically building a list. So teaching courses drop-ins doing the doors of stuff, then you were like, Hey, guys, I'm running the I want to set up this team. And the exec asked you to join. I want to go a little bit more into that moment. But was there anything else you were doing with Missimp? At this time?

Emily Brady 10:25

I was trying to i,

Richard Minkley 10:27

you said in your life, actually, I remember that. Remember, that remembers me Can't do English. I'm afraid that maybe you will also doing a lot of smash night, I believe at a time. That's what you said at the end of your last interview as well. So you're also doing that?

Emily Brady 10:41

Yeah, I think I was in like the first four smash nights, either in like, teams, or in the social club, or like guesting with, like people who came through. And I think it was also around that time, because I think I did that thing that I do when Star Wars have their show in like May. And I was like, man, star wars improv, Star Wars is great. And so fun. And Nick was like, do you want to be in it? I was like, Yes, please. So I wasn't actually in a show for quite, I think a little while after they met me join. But like, and they don't have Star Wars doesn't tend to rehearse unless there's a show coming up.

Richard Minkley 11:19

What would What was the name of the Star Wars Show? Because I do know, it's had a couple of different names.

Emily Brady 11:24

But at that point it was, what was it? It was it wasn't It's a trap, Because that's what it is now.

Richard Minkley 11:34

Was it? Was it millions of voices at the time?

Emily Brady 11:37

Yes, it was millions of voices.

Richard Minkley 11:39

I see. Okay, that's interesting.

Emily Brady 11:42

I was just looking it up on facebook, [as if i'd] remembered

Richard Minkley 11:47

That's very that's that's an interesting thing. Actually, I'm going to make a note of this. In fact, I may be you may be hearing this in the documentary I'm going to make after this about like, isn't it interesting how we can harvest data off of Facebook to remember stuff? Isn't that weird? Yeah. So lots of stuff going on. I'm interested in one of the things I really want to dig into a little bit with this final interview with you is the leadership and the exec and the kind of structures that have formed since we moved into the malt cross. 2016 2017. ish. So you said you spoke to the exec about joining. This implies many things. One is that the exec existed as like an executive committee or group, and that they'd already been going for a while. So was there an exec that would have been recognised as the exec? Or was it just a bunch of people who were responsible for stuff?

Emily Brady 12:45

I think it was, it was kind of both like, I remember when I joined, I wasn't sure who was on the exec and who wasn't. not in like, Uh, oh, my God, who are these people kind of way, but just like, I wasn't, it didn't really affect me to begin with.

Richard Minkley 13:00

Okay.

Emily Brady 13:01

And I think it was all quiet in like, I don't, I didn't like get down on one knee and present myself to the executive. It was more like, I was chatting to Liam and Lloydie and Nick and Marilyn about it in particular. And then they sort of were like, Emily said this, like, we think that we should bring her and they they had like an I believe they had an online learning not learning an online workspace called slack at that point.

Richard Minkley 13:24

Yeah.

Emily Brady 13:25

Which became the bane of my life when I joined the exec. But like, Yes, I think that a lot of conversations and decisions happened over like that platform. So yeah.

Richard Minkley 13:36

That is interesting. So who was on the exec when you first joined? Who was that group?

Emily Brady 13:45

So I believe and my I might be wrong, but it was Nick Tyler, Marilyn Bird, Liam Webber, Ben MacPhearson, Minder Athwal and Nick Parkhouse.

Richard Minkley 13:58

Okay, frantically writing some of this down. Okay, that's interesting. Um, yeah. So do you... man. Sorry. There's, there's a whole host of questions in front of me at the minute and so many different ways I want to ask it but like, what, in fact, yeah. Before we go into the stuff you did? Oh, man, my brain. Sorry it's just sorting all this information. What do you feel happened first? The podcast, the vortex, which is, was your all female group, or joining the exec because I'm trying to build this kind of chronologically in my head.

Emily Brady 14:45

I think well, to complicate things further, I think it depends on your definition of like starting things.

Richard Minkley 14:51

Tell me tell me about that

Emily Brady 14:53

I was laying the groundwork for a lot of stuff like the podcast, I was laying the groundwork for, for from like the beginning of September. But it didn't come out probably for a few more months. And I was thinking about it. And like, I remember with that podcast it was I had the idea for it in literally like July, maybe even earlier. And I spent about three months trying to think of a title. Like it just took me I'm never good with naming stuff. It took me forever. So I would say that I, I joined the exec. I put out my first podcast episode, and then the vortex auditions didn't happen until like, November, December.

Richard Minkley 15:35

Okay. So you, you, you, that was the kind of order in which you remember it, because it sounds like you were already working very much on the podcast side of things kind of bringing some stuff together. Then the joining the exec came before actually starting the team.

Emily Brady 15:53

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 15:54

that's interesting. So yeah, that's interesting, then. So in that brief period, before you went straight into being leading that team and the all female team, what, what was it like being on the exact for the first time?

Emily Brady 16:10

Um, it was really, it was really good. Um, I think I one one thing that I think with Missimp, because I like spoilers, but I'm now no longer on the exec. I think I didn't appreciate the power that came with being on the exec. And I know that sounds very silly, because it's like a community interest Missimp group. But I think I was like, I'm just idiot Emily. Like, it doesn't matter what I think or what I say like, I'm still the same person. And I remember we did a few shows in like, October I think we did a Missimp on fire show. Hmm. You and I were both in it.

Richard Minkley 16:58

I remember. Yeah. I was working. Yeah,

Emily Brady 17:00

it was set in a coal mine.

Richard Minkley 17:03

Oh, yeah. And then I started being incredibly mean. I think I started being incredibly mean to a canary.

Emily Brady 17:11

Yes, yeah.

Richard Minkley 17:12

I remember that one.

Emily Brady 17:14

Yeah. And then we also did. One of the reasons I waited to start the vortex was because we did. That was one of the first years I think that nottingham. We did nottingham comedy festival.

Richard Minkley 17:29

Yeah, that sounds about

Emily Brady 17:31

Yeah, we did it at the, because Katie Mitchell was running a venue out of the angel at the time. And I think we did. Like we definitely I cant remember exactly which shows we did. I think there were, there was a couple of double bills, but we definitely did rhymes. And we definitely did vox pops. And maybe millions of voices, but I'm not sure. But yeah, I think I joined the exec. And I didn't really feel like things changed too much. Except I got more of a glimpse of what was happening behind the scenes. And

probably I should have like, modified my behaviour a bit more than I did. Because it does like you are in a position of authority.

Richard Minkley 18:14

That's interesting. So before we go into that change in authority and power, how did you what you said, You got a glimpse of what was going on behind the scenes. Now, this is probably going to be a very boring question. Because I imagine you're not just going around doing extra secret improv stuff, having a great time. What kind of stuff was happening behind the scenes that people might Yeah, what was happening behind the scenes?

Emily Brady 18:38

[iyeeeeerm]

Richard Minkley 18:42

That was an interesting noise.

Emily Brady 18:46

Yeah, try and transcribe that. Yeah, lots of stuff. Yeah, I'm, I'm, I'm aware that there's probably quite a lot of stuff that I don't feel comfortable talking about

Richard Minkley 18:57

thats

Emily Brady 18:57

because

Richard Minkley 18:57

perfectly fine.

Emily Brady 18:59

[-] so I think in terms of organising there was obviously like, the practical stuff. And, and there was also some, like discussions, but they were very sort of they were sort of macro discussions have been on a micro scale, about the kind of shows that we should be doing. So like, whether it was we should be doing more short form stuff, whether we should be doing more long form stuff, like and, and yeah, that sort that sort of thing. a lot of it was just like the day to day practicalities of like, who's running this week's drop in and who's teaching this next course. But yeah, so no, it was. It was Yeah, and it didn't change my perception of Missimp when. I think that was the main thing like it going, seeing behind the scenes didn't make me be like, Oh my God. Like it was just like, Oh, this is how things are decided and things are done,

Richard Minkley 20:04

That's interesting. So you said two things there one of them is the practical stuff. And one of them is like choosing the kind of improv that was happening. Two really interesting topics that let I'm gonna hover a bit on the practical stuff. What is the practical stuff of running an improv community? Because again, it's not going to be fun, is it? It's not going to be like, Hey, guys, let's just play some games in the exec meeting. It's going to be the the awkward, difficult stuff.

Emily Brady 20:31

Yeah, of course. So like I sort of mentioned earlier, there was talk for a little while about us getting a space. But Missimp is run entirely by volunteers. And so to have to be managing a space, like a theatre, or is entirely volunteers, it's just you can't do it. Like, I don't I don't think like health and safety wise, it would be wise, but also just like to ask that of people like to be running a venue, you know, five, six nights a week is just like, you'd have to you'd have to employ someone as like a theatre manager. So a lot of it was like sorting out rooms, making sure that rooms were booked and paid for. A lot of it was like making sure that there were people teaching that week's drop in. There was, yeah, and like, stuff looking forward. So like arranging, what shows we're going to be on at the Nottingham Playhouse. What shows we're going to be on at Nottingham Comedy Festival. And yeah, I think Missimp is a very little like, it's a very interesting community. Because it's run by volunteers. And it is a community, now it's a community interest organisation. So it toes this real line between obligation to the community. And like, I can't quite like phrase, I don't know how to phrase this right, but basically, like, obligation to like the audience. And so I think it's, it's one thing that was I kind of began to see there, that in a purely community invested organisation, like it wouldn't matter how much experience or how much or how like, good you were at improv like that, you would just get put on stage as much as you wanted to get come on stage. But from like a, I guess, like from a financial and from like, an audience perspective, like if you put people on stage who either aren't ready, like, because they've not quite got the skill level yet, or various reasons. And those people won't come back and they won't like tell people to go to this show.

Richard Minkley 22:46

Yeah.

Emily Brady 22:47

So it's a really interesting, like, I don't think there's an answer to it. I think it's a dilemma that an organisation like Missimp has in that you've got this obligation to like put out quality stuff that will keep people coming back and will keep like money going through the organisation that you can then put back into the community, and also the obligation to the community to like, give them a platform. And I think like efforts have been made over the years to find a happy medium with that, like, you've got shows like Missimp on fire, which is about putting people who haven't had a chance to perform before on stage. But I know it's like a, it's just like an interesting conundrum of being an organisation like this.

Richard Minkley 23:29

That's interesting. How important do you think the audience is to the community?

Emily Brady 23:36

Well, this is yes, this is I think this is a thing like we we did a survey A few years ago, about like, what people wanted Missimp to do differently. And like, a thing that people a few people kept saying was like, we want more audience, we want bigger audiences. And that's not something that you can just like snap your fingers and give like it does rely on like having a good social media having and then like, once you've got people to the show, like people getting people to come back. I think if I really do think that, like the audience is one of the most important things because if you were doing improv to an empty theatre, like it's a miserable experience. I've been there, like its. No one would no one would enjoy it if you were just doing it to an empty room.

Richard Minkley 24:22

Yeah.

Emily Brady 24:23

And I do. And I think that's one of the like conundrums of Missimp is that you've, you have an obligation to the community, but you also have an obligation to your audience. And it's trying to find that like that balance that satisfies everyone.

Richard Minkley 24:38

That's really interesting, because there's a sense that the community is also interested in that obligation to the audience. It's kind of implied that Well, no, its explicit You just said you did a survey and people were like, We want more people to watch us doing stuff. Is that a fair way to describe the result of the survey?

Emily Brady 24:58

Yeah, there was there was very Like a broad, there was lots of feedback and stuff. And but that was, that was one of the things. And yes, I'd say that's fair and like, it's understandable as well, like, I don't think Missimp at the time at survey Missimp was not doing badly for audiences. But there definitely been a few smash nights that had been a bit quieter than others. And a few like other events that I'm trying to, I think actually, maybe smash night was once a month at that point. So like, yeah, there's been a few where it was maybe a bit quieter. And, and yeah, so I can see why like that is important to people. But then it's, it's how do you weigh up, putting a quality show that people will want to come back to, against like giving a platform to new and inexperienced people? Because you want them to have a platform?

Richard Minkley 25:44

This is interesting. how? Because I've asked one version of this question. So I feel like I need to ask the other. Do you think the audience cares about the community?

Emily Brady 26:00

Oh, that's a really good question. Um, I would actually say honestly, probably probably not, like to begin with, I think there's there's definitely been people in the community now who have been to see a Missimp show, and then been like, Oh, I want to try that. And then like, joined the community. But I think the average the average audience goer, especially at venues like the Nottingham Playhouse, where, for the most part, people who go to that show aren't people who know Missimp as an organisation at all, they just see the title of the show and are like, Well, that sounds cool. yeah, I would say probably, probably not like, maybe they fall into it by going to shows or maybe then they find out about it by looking at like the Facebook page afterwards. But I would say the average audience go when they go to Missimp show, they don't really care, like about the people on stage, in the nicest possible way. They're just there to like, be entertained. And obviously, they're probably preoccupied with like, you know, the gender balance on stage and the level of diversity on stage. I'm not saying that. But I mean, like in terms of the I don't think people going to the shows the average audience goer isn't going because they're like, I'm going to support this local community organisation like they're going because they're like, this looks funny.

Richard Minkley 27:19

Yeah. And also, to be fair, like, you wouldn't say that for other things where like, people aren't going to watch the Avengers, because they really care about Chris Evans' well being they want to see that film.

Emily Brady 27:30

That's a bad example, man. He's pretty.

Richard Minkley 27:33

I know, actually, a couple of days ago, it was proved that that was not the case. But you know what, it's the same thing like people, people. It's about the entertainment for the audience. And that's kind of the deal.

Emily Brady 27:44

And I think in the nicest possible way, if you were to do a show that was just not very good. The audience would not be like, well, they're only a community organisation. Like, they wouldn't let the average audience go and just be like, Well, that wasn't very good. Which, like, I don't think Missimp has ever done a show that was flat out bad. But like, hypothetically.

Richard Minkley 28:04

Yeah. And I suppose Would you say that the the community kind of accepts that deal? That if you're going to be putting on a show, you want to be doing a good show? Not a bad show? Or is it much more of that sort of like, it's more about the experience and what you're trying to do than necessarily how the audience takes it with? Are they accepting that kind of deal?

Emily Brady 28:29

I don't, I mean, it's hard to say this is the thing that I've kind of realised over my time in the exec is that, it's, it's hard for me to say, Oh, yeah, everyone's fine with that, because I'm one of the people in the ivory tower. I would say, I think one thing that Missimp has tried to do increasingly with structures like nonsuch is, there's almost like a I don't know how to express this in a way that doesn't sound horribly elitist. There's almost like a sort of tier ranking of like, shows in accordance with how professional you have to be and how, like, polished you have to be. So like with stuff like gorilla burger. It's like it's really loose, you can have a drink, you can show up anyone can can perform. But you have still got those lights and stuff. So there is an element of like stage time to it. And then we'd like smash night. There's also a degree of like, you know, there's there's looseness you can cut loose and have fun. But you're still on stage, like you're still expected to put that one you can't drink. Like you've got to show up on time, you've got to stick to the format like and then now you've got shows like nonsuch where it's again, it's still like, pretty like you can come along. You can propose whatever you like, like you can do what you like, but there's like a structure to it. There's a format, and then you've got shows like the Playhouse where it's like, you have to be really like polished to do that. And I think it reflects like one both the relationship Between the venue and Missimp for both of those things. And so for instance, like with with the Playhouse like they do expect a certain level of like professionalism, and quality. So you wouldn't put a load of people on stage who'd never done improv before. Whereas for something like gorilla burger, or even like smash night, some people just just started and they have no idea. Like, you'd be like, yeah, cool, have a go. Let's see what happens.

Richard Minkley 30:29

This is a fascinating conversation to have had about like, the practical stuff, I want to ask. I want to summarise one more question or ask for more One more question. Before we go on to the all female team you setup. You were describing the practical stuff, which I believe is very important. Is there anything else other than making sure that there are people in rooms at particular times? Because that feels like what you were talking about? And I feel like I'm really boiling down some complicated stuff. But that sounds like the simple thing, as long as that you've got certain people in certain rooms at certain times. Is there anything else?

Emily Brady 31:14

You know, I feel like that's how Missimp was for a while but it was like, if you have the people in the room, that was ample. But by the time I joined, like there was social media stuff, you know, there's a Facebook a Twitter and an Instagram that needs to be managed. And that takes a lot of attention and a lot of energy. so stuff around like, both shows and drop-ins, like making sure you've got the right graphic design for it. And like having that consistent. And then I think when I first joined the exec there wasn't a very robust welfare structure.

Richard Minkley 31:53

Yeah.

Emily Brady 31:54

And then increasingly, like over the time, that I was there, not because I pioneered it, but just because it like, I think that the era that it fell in, like there became like a more robust welfare structure. Which is like a whole other interesting thing without having a community organisation, and like your obligations to welfare and stuff. And then yeah, there was there was just loads and loads of stuff.

Richard Minkley 32:22

Yeah.

Emily Brady 32:22

And yeah, like big both like in terms of, Oh, we've got people in the room this week. And then like, well, how are we going to keep people in the room like six months from now?

Richard Minkley 32:31

Yeah.

Emily Brady 32:32

What other stuff Are we going to be doing?

Richard Minkley 32:36

So much fascinating stuff there. Speaking of other stuff that you were doing, when did you first go from having, because we've talked already covered about you having the idea and talking about it? When was the first time you went from thinking about having an all female team to making actual physical steps on the path to setting that up.

Emily Brady 33:01

So I've been like, as I said, I've been thinking about it for a while. And then I can't remember when I, I basically I set up a Facebook event. And I can't remember exactly when but I do remember that I was promoting it during like, Nottingham comedy festival that year, like at the gorilla burger we held was actually going to another show across town, but I like stuck my head in and it was like come and audition to be in the all female team. So it was like, and I think Nick did the graphic design for the event and stuff. So it was like a proper, like thing. But the thing with the with the team that was the yet unnamed, was that I did want it to be quite collaborative. I didn't want to have a name for it. And I was I did want to do a Harold That was I wanted it to be all female. I wanted it to be a Harold But beyond that, I was like I kind of wanted the group to have a say in like what it was called and like. like kind of what kind of stuff they wanted to do. I knew I kind of wanted it to be quite slow burn and emotional stuff. Because at the time I felt that was kind of as well, like one of the things Missimp didn't really

have. Because in terms of teams at that point, I think it was like Rhymes, the vox pops and The Star Wars Show.

Richard Minkley 34:24

Yeah,

Emily Brady 34:25

I think that was it. But I'm not sure they sort of had like a load of people who did short form as well. But there wasn't like a solid unit behind that.

Richard Minkley 34:33

I must ask as well, because I know. This is kind of bringing something in. Had you run any other female only events by this point, or did the team come first?

Emily Brady 34:43

No.

Richard Minkley 34:43

no. So this was the first female only thing basically?

Emily Brady 34:48

Yes. Yeah. The audition was the first all female event that happened.

Richard Minkley 34:54

Okay.

Emily Brady 34:56

Yeah, sorry.

Richard Minkley 34:57

No, no, yeah. I'm here to hear what you think. What we're you going to say?

Emily Brady 35:01

i was just going to, because the audition was great, like [-], there were actually a couple of people in particular, who I was like, really inspired to start the team by, and like people who weren't in house teams, but were really good. And I kind of intended the team to, my intent for the team was that it would like, empower the women who were in the team, but then other women who like saw the team would be like, Oh, my goodness, I can do this, too. So there were a couple of people, not all of whom auditioned, but though I was like, there is a gap where like people like you would fit. And so then I held the audition. It was upstairs at the angel. I think it was in late November. It was in. It was November the 13th. I've remembered from nowhere.

Richard Minkley 36:04

That's the sound of you remembering not the sound of anybody looking at Facebook, that'd be ridiculous. This is 2017.

Emily Brady 36:12

It was the year of our lord... 20... 17.

Richard Minkley 36:19

there we go. See, you're really good at remembering.

Emily Brady 36:23

Yes,

Richard Minkley 36:24

that's okay. So what was the audition? Like? How did it work?

Emily Brady 36:29

I loved it. It was so great. And so I was very, very, very nervous. Like, very nervous, because I thought I was really scared that no one would show up. And I've gotten quite a lot of messages from not a whole lot, but like a handful of messages from people going like, oh, man, this sounds great. But like I really can't commit at the moment. And it was like, Oh, no, no one's gonna come. And, and in the end, I think there was about 26 people, which at the time was like the biggest audition Missimp had ever had.

Richard Minkley 37:01

Wow, that's a that's a lot of people.

Emily Brady 37:04

And all women as well.

Richard Minkley 37:05

Wow.

Emily Brady 37:06

Yeah, there was a real like, it was the thing that was really interesting was that there was a real range of like, because it hadn't we hadn't put any money on advertising it but there'd been like a Facebook event and stuff. And so you had people who'd never done improv before. And then you had people who'd done improv, but never done it in Nottingham. So there was a couple of people who made. Actually, no, there was certainly, and there were seven people who I decided for the team. And possibly, like, I don't, I think three of them had never done improv in Nottingham before, or like I've never seen them do improv in Nottingham before. So it was, it was a really worth it was it was a really nice, at least, I mean, I feel bad, like from my perspective as the person running it like, it was really lovely, empowering event. And obviously, it was slightly, you know, [had that edge] that it was an audition. But basically, it was like a load of open scenes, a few like few warmups, a load of open scenes. And then the final thing I did was that I did open scenes, but I gave them like a specific direction.[-]

Richard Minkley 39:36

Okay. Um, the thing is, I've got, I'm just putting it in my head a little bit. So one of the things let's just pull out a little bit of the expectations you had of what you wanted for the team. Particularly You said you wanted something slow and emotional, and you wanted a Harold now, I'm gonna I know what a Harold is. I'm going to quickly I'm going to quickly summarise it and then you can tell me if that sounds about right. There's basically a series of three scenes where you do the first scene, the second scene, the third scene, then there's a game where of some description, which breaks the pattern. And then

you come back to the first scene, then the second scene, then the third scene with a bit of a variation, then you have another game. And then there's the first scene third scene. final scene with that variation, even bigger.

Emily Brady 40:21

yeah

Richard Minkley 40:22

Is that roughly what a Harold this?

Emily Brady 40:25

Yeah, I'd that's Yes. It's very, very, that's very, very good, well done.

Richard Minkley 40:29

oh, thank you.

Emily Brady 40:31

But it's three sets of three scenes broken up by some sort of game. It's a very like American. Chicago format,

Richard Minkley 40:41

not

Emily Brady 40:41

I'd say it doesn't necessarily have to be bigger. At the end, it just has to be like conclusive. But other than that, I would say yes, you are correct. well done.

Richard Minkley 40:52

thank you. I know I did. I did a great job. Let's just sit talk about that for a bit. no. Um, you describe, sorry go on.

Emily Brady 41:01

I think it's because of the it's the format that I did in uni a lot. And like, especially during the Edinburgh shows that I tended to enjoy the most It was like, the Harold was what we did.

Richard Minkley 41:15

So why was it so why were you looking for something slow and emotional? Like, you talked about it as if that's not something you would normally get from improv? Is that fair to say?

Emily Brady 41:28

Yeah, I think, I think certainly within Missimp at the time, it was less common. Now, I think the landscapes changed a little bit. And there are a lot of teams that are doing like slow burn emotional stuff. I mean, in Missimp, you've got Denise's 50th. There's other teams around the UK, like even even teams like Austentatious. Like, I'd describe that as kind of like slow burn emotional stuff, even though it's really really funny. I just I wanted something that was a bit more grounded in like, like, it could still be really funny. But I wanted something that was a bit more grounded in real emotion. So like, you know, you could be acting annoyed because someone painted your giraffe Pink. But I like you'd be

acting like it was genuinely The worst thing in the world. Like, rather than being like my giraffe is pink, [duogh], which I'm looking forward to seeing you transcribe

Richard Minkley 42:23

yeah. So am I. That's interesting, because there's, I feel like these words like slow burn, emotional grounded. I've heard these phrases a lot. But I'm not necessarily sure what they particularly mean. Because they used often referring to the same thing, like no one, I don't think there's much distinction between something which is slow burn, and something which is grounded, or something which is grounded and which is emotional. They feel like they mean, they refer to this as a similar kind of show. Is that fair to say?

Emily Brady 42:56

Yeah, but I think they, they're complimentary, but I don't think they're completely, like, interchangeable. So like, for me slow, you can have something that's slow burn, but not grounded. Like,

Richard Minkley 43:08

yeah,

Emily Brady 43:09

you could have a really in, you know, you could have like a scene between like two trolls under a bridge, talking about their day as they're like slaughtering a goat like that wouldn't be, that would be slow burn, but it wouldn't be very grounded. And then like, likewise, you could have a show that's grounded, but like, not like you could have politicians running around as the world's about to end. And that would be like, grounded, but it wouldn't be slow burn. Yeah, I think like they are naturally complimentary terms. But I don't think they're completely interchangeable.

Richard Minkley 43:41

So what what would taken together? What do you think they're pointing to as a group of terms, because when you mix them all together, there is a feeling of a show, which I feel like I understand, but I couldn't put it into words. And seeing as you cast an entire show around these ideas. What were you aiming for with that other than just these particular terms?

Emily Brady 44:01

I guess I was aiming for a degree of naturalism. And like, even if something ridiculous was happening, the audience to be invested in the characters as people and and to like to get the basically, to get the audience to care about them. And because that was always the most rewarding experience I had during improv, especially during uni like I felt, and actually during my rhymes, as well, like I found the moments where you were sort of appealing to the humanity of the audience, rather than trying to make them laugh all the time. And worse, some of the most rewarding moments and I was kind of like, I want a team that does that. And it did, like as based on how it was cast and like how we worked through it did end up like I would say it did end up being quite naturalistic it was often quite absurd naturalism, if that makes sense. So like the situate, like the situation that the characters were in was insane. But they were acting quite realistic around it. And also the idea. I kind of. I am not an all unlike I do not speak widely for Missimp when I say this, but I'm of the opinion that like, if you can do the Harold, you can pretty much do any form of improv,

Richard Minkley 45:14

thats interesting.

Emily Brady 45:15

because it's all based on like being able to call stuff back and heighten things and like, well, if this is true, then what else is true? And I think the Harold teaches a lot of skills. I don't necessarily think that it's always the best performance, like, venue, you know, it can be and I've seen it be, and I think it was a lot of the time for the team that I was directing. But I think it was I kind of thought it's gonna be a Harold team. But then if once like, everyone's at a really high level with the Harold, they decide they want to do something else, then that's fine.

Richard Minkley 45:55

I'm gonna, sorry, carry on.

Emily Brady 45:57

No, its fine.

Richard Minkley 45:59

We've come to the point where I'm going to have to stop this half of the recording, I just want to ask one more question. Because you described it as one of the things you're aiming for is to appeal to the humanity of the audience, which is very interesting phrase. And is kind of beginning to spill out the boundaries of my project. However, would you say that previously, or like, generally, improv doesn't normally appeal to the audience's sense of humanity? Or is that a new development in the way improv has work?

Emily Brady 46:34

Um, I think that improv You know, it does appeal to people's humanity. But I think there's an extent to which in some forms of improv, it appeals in the same way to like the audience's humanity as someone spinning plates appeals to someone's humanity, like, a lot of, I think, some improv A lot of it is like spin, the appeal to the audience is like spinning plates. So you're like, Oh, my God, how are they doing that? Like, they're spinning those plates, like they're making it up on the spot. That's amazing. Which is great, and like really valid. But then I think the audience is more interested in the plates that are spinning than the actual like person who's spinning the plates. And I'm not saying that like one way is right. And one way is wrong, at all. But I think just like, Yeah, when I came to do the team, that would become the vortex, I was a lot more interested in the person spinning the plates than the plates. If that makes sense.

Richard Minkley 47:27

That does make sense and it's a fantastic metaphor. I'm going to stop this recording. And then we'll sort stuff out and then we'll come back to the second half. Thank you very much. Bear with me.

b) Part 2 of 2

17th September 2020

Richard Minkley 47:39

I'm gonna hit record here. We are recording on both it is 11:12. On Thursday, the 17th of September. I am back with Emily Brady. My name is Richard Minkley, and I am doing the Missimp oral history project.

Emily Brady 47:52

Yay, you said it right.

Richard Minkley 47:53

I think I got it all there. I didn't mention it was a podcast, dammit. Okay, so we've kind of had a talk about what you were aiming for with the vortex to begin with. I'm going to have to skip ahead a little bit because time is short. Peak vortex. Oh, no. In fact, yeah. The name vortex what was the vortex? Especially like, the peak of it? What was the kind of? I'm gonna ask one question, instead of like, fragments of nine. What was the vortex in the end.

Emily Brady 48:31

So the vortex became, yeah, it became like an all female Harold team. And it was a lot more grounded than a lot of other improv that was going on in Missimp at the time, but it was still quite absurd. And I think that was because of the people that we had in the team. So it was a lot of quiet, like ridiculous scenarios played straight. And it was it was like emotional, and it was really funny. And yeah, the name came because we spent, as I said, I'm awful at naming things. And we spent months workshopping a name, like months, and I'd suggest something and people would be like, no. And then we went on a trip to go and see a Nottingham based female show called cover the shows called major Labia, or the group is called major Labia. But they had a sketch in their show, where a woman was talking about how her vagina was like a vortex and it just kept sucking everything up. And then like, you came out, we were like the vortex. It means like, going somewhere and seeing something magical. But also it could mean vagina. We know it means vagina. And yeah, like we did the first ever all female improv show in the Midlands.

Richard Minkley 49:54

Wow.

Emily Brady 49:55

Yeah. in I think May the next year because I was keen that I didn't Want to like? I literally started doing the rehearsals from like, yes, And. even though most people were way, cool with it at that point, but I had like a really set idea in my head of how it would go and how it would like, build up and it was quite rigid. And I think in hindsight, I could have been a little bit more flexible with it. But at the time, I was like, I must, I must have an exact plan of how this will go. And so I think they did that first smash night in like, March or April. And then the first show that was them headlining it was an all female show. And I think the structure was it was squid Heart from Birmingham, who, Kate Knight, and Suzy Evans. And

then the vortex headlined, and then we had like, an open all female jam at the end. And that was great. That was like, that was a real high point for me. And being able to do that show and like, it sold out really quickly as well. It was at the angel, so that was like, a really nice moment. So yeah, it was um, and, and I've one thing that I'm really proud of with the vortex was that a lot of like, a lot of it got a few more it got a lot more women into improv.

Richard Minkley 51:19

Yeah.

Emily Brady 51:19

And there's quite a few like friendships now that are really strong, from people who like met through the vortex. And so that's like, that's something that I'm really proud of.

Richard Minkley 51:29

Yeah. So who was the if you have to talk about it, who was in the vortex? I mean, not in the sense of who was in the team, not who was trapped in the metaphorical vagina. Although that's the name of the show. So who else was in there?

Emily Brady 51:45

Yeah. The original cast based on the auditions was Diane Parkhouse. Minder Athwal. Nicky Morgan, Rosie Francis. And Pippa Hastings. Milou And was that? Was it just six or whoever? Oh, no, I hope I'm not forgetting someone? It might have just been six? Yes. I think it was six. Was those six.

Richard Minkley 52:14

Okay. And?

Emily Brady 52:17

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 52:20

Without going into any sort of of the reasons why would the people join in and leave? Like who else was involved in the vortex if you have to talk about that?

Emily Brady 52:29

Yeah. So Diane, left, in the February, March, following year. And then a lady called Seema came up from London. And she joined I want to say around like a month, two months, six weeks later. So it did change quite quickly.

Richard Minkley 52:54

I believe that's everyone? Is there anybody else that would have appeared or disappeared? No?

Emily Brady 52:58

no, no, that was it.

Richard Minkley 53:03

There's so many different bits and bobs I want to talk about, we could do a whole two hours on the vortex easily. But something I'm particularly interested in is the effect of an all female team on the community because I think it's safe to say that Missimp is a fairly male dominated community. So I'm

interested, both what was the difference in having an all female team? And how did having an all female team affect the community at large? So I work on the first question, which is what was the difference? Like, what was an all female team like? And then we'll talk about the the broader effect separately. So yeah, what was it like having an all female team, because you'd already been on other teams, like you've been in a in a mixed team, which because of our culture means there was a predominantly male team. So it wasn't like having a female?

Emily Brady 54:01

Well, I would say it was, it was great. Like I really, the sensation of doing and probably not an all female room was was really great. And it was different to any experience I'd had before. Like it was, there was a lot more like sensitivity and discussion of boundaries. But one thing I would qualify all of these statements with was that I was very strict with myself about being the director and not being in the team. And I don't think I've stated that because at the time the model [in] Missimp was that most of the directors were in the team. So like Ben with the vox pops Lloydie with rhymes. And that worked like really, really well. But the way that I had always been taught improv was that you have a separate director, and I really wanted to try that model. And so even though I was like, you know, I was part of the team I was leading it like I think there were, I was I was kind of on the outside simultaneously like by design. But so like, I imagine that actually being in the team was probably quite a different experience like directing the team. If that makes sense.

Richard Minkley 55:08

That does make sense. And it also helps me with my question, because you watched the team. explicitly, that was your job. So did you see anything different? Like you use the word, the sensation was great. Like, what was the sensation? What did you see?

Emily Brady 55:26

I think it was quite an empowering experience. And it was just like, I don't it's tricky, because I don't want to like generalise and say like, all women in improv a really like, sensitive Mother Nature, pretty flower birds who take care of each other. But I think I really did feel that there was a lot more openness and honesty with each other about like people's boundaries for the day. And like, especially once we've been going for a few like months and had to sort of work past those initial like, getting to know each other things. Um, and yeah, I think I am really proud of what the vortex did, because I do think there was Missimp, did get a lot bigger from the time that I joined it. Like when I first started going, it wasn't, it was still, you know, sizable, but it wasn't, by the time that I was doing the vortex as the director like it had, it had gotten so much bigger, it was almost doubled in size. And I did notice more women, especially on like courses and stuff. I think and like, one thing I did notice that I think just rings true because I did it as well, was that like women would come and it would sometimes it would be because they saw the vortex like there was a couple of people who came because they were at the vortex's first show. And but they'd want to just sort of sit and watch the first couple of times. And then of course, when they finally got to do it, they were amazing. But yeah, it was. The one thing with the vortex is, I do think it had a positive impact on women in the community. Because I think there's an element of like, if I can see people like me doing this, then I can do it too. That definitely rings true. But I think I overestimated the impact it would have on like, other women in Missimp, if that made sense. So like the people who didn't get cast, which I think I just I was at the time I thought like if there's a female team, then it's good for all women. And it was like it was good to have more visibility. But in terms of the actual like community, I don't think it provided [very many] more opportunities for women in the community feel like it was just sort of show it was an opportunity to use the people in the teams. And you know, I think it did like there's some women who are in the vortex have gone on for like to do

teaching now. And a lot of them are doing like fantastic stuff. But in hindsight, I kind of wish I'd done it, because I now, I before I left the exec. I was running, orchestrating, a series of female led workshops. Which I'm jumping ahead massively

Richard Minkley 58:11

No, no, go for it because it's relevant.

Emily Brady 58:13

But this started in 20, January 2019. And in hindsight, I kind of wish I'd done the workshops before the troupe. Because I think the workshops had a really positive impact on the community because they were those workshops were where we get a female teacher, either, like, normally from somewhere in the UK, like, we've had American people actually, but like, it's normally from people outside of Nottingham to like expand the scope of teaching that you get.

Richard Minkley 58:43

Yeah.

Emily Brady 58:45

But like so 16 women, it was it's been subsidised this year by the women's centre. So it's kept the cost is kept really low. And it's that that has had a huge impact, like that's had people coming to do improv for the first time because I think like the feedback I've seen is that people have felt more secure giving something like that a go in an all female environment. And I feel like that had a really empowering effect on the community that did see to, quite a few more women joining. And also like people assuming positions of teaching and like a lot of women got their first teaching experience through those workshops. So like KI SHAH, from Nottingham, from Leicester, Nikki and Pippa from the vortex did it once. And yeah, I think I don't I don't regret doing the vortex at all. But I do think in hindsight, that if I'd have swapped those projects around, I would have had the experience of like organising and like empowering the community before like starting a team. And because I do think the vortex did have a positive impact on the community.

Richard Minkley 59:55

Why did you do Oh? Why did you do it that way round.

Emily Brady 1:00:00

Because, um, I think at the time in Missimp, there was like, I think Missimp has kind of a culture of like, if you have an idea, you can just set up a team and do it. And either you can run auditions or you can just like, ask your friends. So like now there's teams like Denise's 50th and squares and the round. And they're just groups of people who really like working together. So they've gone Let's be a team.

Richard Minkley 1:00:25

Yeah.

Emily Brady 1:00:26

But at the time, it was like, What rhymes had been a team and they'd had auditions. Vox pops had been a team and they had auditions. And I think I kind of thought, I didn't consider that there was another way or another project that I could do. I was like, well i should like this, this is the way that if you have an idea of something you want to do you do it. And it wasn't like a hard or fast rule at all, but it just didn't enter into my head to do it into another way.

Richard Minkley 1:00:49

Hmm, that's interesting. So to come back on some of the things you've talked about there? Well, basically, when I asked you to describe what the difference was inside the vortex, again, incredible name, because now, every everything you say about the vortex is a joke. You said that there were more boundaries, that and that was one of the things that you could tell was different with this team than other teams. And I can understand that there's some very personal things going to be in there. And you don't have to say anything that you don't have to but what kind of things were the boundaries? What what what does it mean to have a boundary in that particular context?

Emily Brady 1:01:31

So sort of saying, I do not feel comfortable joking about this. And then everyone would just be like, yep, cool. We're not joking about this. And, like, there were a few occasions where we would just like stop rehearsal and be like, right, let's like have a reconsideration of our boundaries. Rather than, like powering through, which was like, it was something I hadn't experienced in the same way before. Like, normally bound. And it's happened like, since I think Missimp become a lot more aware of it, but like, there was you know, and that seems like rhymes against humanity, we were pretty good at. I remember, before our first Playhouse show. I can't remember whether I was like, quite I think I was pushing for it quite a bit. But one thing in particular was like, kissing. So like in improv, sometimes if you're improvising like a romantic relationship with someone like, and it's not, especially in a musical when it's like the big crescendo of the thing. Like, if you kiss them, then it's the audience's like, Hurray. And then it just, it's just a very like, cathartic moment.

Richard Minkley 1:02:40

Yeah.

Emily Brady 1:02:41

But obviously, if someone is not cool with being kissed, which is completely understandable, you need to have a conversation. And in the previous teams that I'd worked with at uni, like it was always you had a conversation, and then once it was on the table, you knew it was there. And if it wasn't, then you knew it wasn't. So that was important to me, like, especially anything, especially it's like exacerbated in a musical context. But like, talking about what people are and aren't uncomfortable with, both in terms of like their bodies, but also like, their, you know, emotional triggers and stuff.

Richard Minkley 1:03:18

That's very interesting. And just, this is a quick question I do, we don't need to go into too much depth about it. But you said, Oh, the way I was taught improv is that the director is separate from the team was that education from the University of Nottingham society?

Emily Brady 1:03:32

yes.

Richard Minkley 1:03:33

Improv society, you'd learn that kind of thing, just

Emily Brady 1:03:36

yep

Richard Minkley 1:03:36

an important detail I thought I'd check upon.

Emily Brady 1:03:38

yep

Richard Minkley 1:03:39

That's very interesting, particularly with this next question, because Missimp is a predominantly male, even even now, not as much, but it's still heavily male. How, what was the effect of having an all female team? And I'll extend the question to include all female workshops on the male, not the male only but the male focused community.

Emily Brady 1:04:08

I'm not sure I understand what you mean, do you mean, what was the impact of it on the men?

Richard Minkley 1:04:12

Well, what I'm thinking is that the culture of Missimp was, if it's predominantly male, then it's it's fair to say that the normal operation would have been as a male, almost like a male coded community, even if they may not have been aware of it. Especially if they've never been an all female group, because I can guarantee there'd been all male groups. There must have been I assume, if it all started as an all male group, I believe, but you've already described some of the effects for women and how it was different. And I'm wondering how that affected the rest of the community. And I decided to describe it as male because I think sometimes we make a distinction between like There is the female only workshop and the normal workshop. And I think it's wrong to describe it as normal. When what normal is considered is mostly men.

Emily Brady 1:05:13

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:05:14

am I making? If I'm not making any sense, you can correct me because you are probably smarter than I am on these issues. But that's the kind of interesting thing because yeah,

Emily Brady 1:05:24

from my understanding of your question, I do not give a shit about in the community. Like, I mean to be that no one was like, affronted or outraged. I think the only like, niggle that I really got was like a few people were like, oh, man, I wish there was a team that I could audition for. But like, I never got the sense of any like, particular resentment. I didn't get my I think people were happy it existed to be fair. And if they weren't, then I think they had the good sense to keep it to themselves.

Richard Minkley 1:05:59

Good. Do you think it changed the community broadly having these extra teams then? not just inside? For example, you were talking about boundaries inside the vortex? Did you see that happening more outside of the all female team afterwards? Like did things learned in the vortex come out and affect the rest of the community? Or was it still quite a segregated experience? I suppose if that's not too loaded a word?

Emily Brady 1:06:28

Um, Yes, I think so is really interesting, because there was definitely before. When I first joined Missimp, there was no like, welfare spiel. I don't know if there was a code of conduct I think there was, but I don't think it was very, like, robust. And then, sort of, partially through my experience working with the vortex and partially through like other factors. And Missimp did like change the way that it operated in terms of like, welfare and sensitivity. So like, and they started doing i cant remember exactly when I feel like it was around March that year, they started doing in every, before for every workshop, and every course that'd be like a spiel. Which was like, when I was doing it, it was, I would basically say like, Missimp policy is like, don't be a dick. So don't be like racist, homophobic, sexist, transphobic. Like, don't touch anywhere, you know, you shouldn't don't pick people up. And like, you have the right to say no, at any point, if someone asks you to do something in a scene that you're not comfortable with. And we'd sort of say that at the top of like, every workshop in every class, and, and I think working in an environment with all women did make me realise how important that was. But I think it was kind of like a change that was coming anyway, like, saying that we didn't have it for as long as we did.

Richard Minkley 1:08:04

Yeah. And it's also hard to differentiate between the effect that the vortex had, and sort of growing feminist culture that was happening in society and improv anyway, like, it's not a perfect thing. But it is interesting to know that those things happened in that order. And I appreciate you being a little bit patient, because it's very awkward asking these questions in the right way. So I appreciate your patience on that. But that's very interesting, because you just talked about the Code of Conduct Code of Conduct coming in March 2018. About?

Emily Brady 1:08:41

I think it went underwent significant like, I was, I think there was definitely like guidelines before, like rules that were in the Facebook group and stuff. But they weren't like, they weren't particularly robust, I would say, because I think one of the, one of the challenges of having a community organisation like Missimp, is that there's a really interesting, [-].

Richard Minkley 1:10:08

It is it is interesting, though, because something that has been talked about is like you, it's interesting to kind of bring this broader. We begin after you've talked about joining the exec, setting up your podcast, your team, your workshops, and it does feel like there has been a change in the way it's run. And particularly in this part of the interview, from when you came back from that Edinburgh Fringe to now it's become a community interest company, it's had code of conduct and policies written, it's learned a lot of lessons and it's, it feels, to me, like there has been a process of almost professionalisation or something like a growth there. So to split that into two, it I suppose,

Emily Brady 1:11:04

only thing that I

Richard Minkley 1:11:04

saw no, go go go go.

Emily Brady 1:11:07

is that about from when I started the vortex to probably the summer of that year, and yeah three people did leave the exec. So the people who were left were me, Nick, Marilyn, Ben and Liam. And, actually, once that happened, there was a degree to which things happened a bit quicker, like not in a

slight to any of the people who left. But I think like having an executive five, we suddenly found like, Oh, we can, like, make decisions quicker. And also, I think there was a degree of like, people got their own projects a bit more. So outside the house teams, I mean, so before, I think it's fair to say that the exec was like, everyone was involved in everything, like people who were directing house teams had their own remit at their house teams, but like everyone had a say in everything, and therefore, like some decision making could be quite cumbersome. Because you have like, eight opinions to take into account. And then when we became an executive five, it changed slightly in the we sort of recognised as volunteers that we didn't need to have. And it is no sleight of the people who left at all. But like, you didn't need to have an opinion on everything. And you didn't have to be involved in everything that Missimp was organising. So for instance, like smash night became a lot more Liam's responsibility. And other odd things like Nottingham Comedy Festival became, like, in subsequent years, like it was more like Liam and I taking the lead on it. And obviously, that everyone's still fed in and all the big decisions and stuff was, like, still factored in. But like, I think Nick took the Hold on, like, gorilla burger and drop-ins. And that was just him a lot more, which had its drawbacks as a change of system because it did mean that like, you know, it was you could get easily overwhelmed if the thing that you were doing was particularly big. But it did change how, when that transition happened, I became a lot more proactive. And personally, that model suited me a bit better, because I like just having a thing that I can work on and just like plow away at. And then and yeah, I think like, that was a learning time.

Richard Minkley 1:13:39

A learning time

Emily Brady 1:13:41

A learning time. But yeah, I don't mean to like discredit, adding people to the exec when loads of people are not to be added to the exact Yeah, and but just at the time, I think like for that transition. When a lot of stuff was changing, like it was, it was an interesting, like time for that to happen.

Richard Minkley 1:14:04

Yeah. And it is also interesting as well, like the thing you're describing there is like multiple things happening all at once. And it's one of the things as well, that's with oral all of the oral history is like everything is happening all of the time. So just because

Emily Brady 1:14:21

i realise as well that I haven't said I was also doing a PhD at this time.

Richard Minkley 1:14:26

Exactly, exactly. All of the things are happening all the time.

Emily Brady 1:14:30

Yeah. So I was also getting called away quite a lot to go to conferences or go on research trips, or just to like, manage my day to day existence of [doing] a PhD. And, and yeah, so I think the flexible nature of the PhD did mean that I took on like quite a lot of stuff, which I was like happy to do.

Richard Minkley 1:14:50

So it's interesting, you've kind of given an interesting summary of the transformation that was happening at the exec level. How did that transformation go on to affect the community? Because we're already getting a sense that there are more projects happening. Like it's not just drop-ins and courses, there was drop-ins and courses and teams, more teams, more shows getting involved in

other festivals and events. Lots of things were kind of added, and from the way you've described it, it sounds like the smaller exec was able to take on more than the way it was before, not just because it was smaller, but because of all those changes that you describe. How did that affect the community? Do you feel?

Emily Brady 1:15:46

Um, I think again, it's it's hard for me to say because I was like, in the sort of exec position. And it's a really interesting one, because I think to an extent, it did, and it didn't affect the community. Like, there's there's always an issue with a community organisation that Missimp like I was talking about earlier with the like, community audience dichotomy, where having more performance opportunities, doesn't necessarily mean that like everyone in the community is getting those opportunities. So I think, yeah, it's really difficult for me to say, I think that it did have it probably had an impact, a positive impact, because there were more opportunities. So for instance, like Minder pioneered a show with the National justice Museum, where like, people were put on trial for crimes like improvisers put on trial, crimes that the audience had committed. And that became in subsequent years, because it was so structured and so short form based, a really good like way to get people in the community who maybe didn't have as much like long form experience to do stuff. And I think gorilla burger became more polished. I think the angel and smash night became like, again, more polished, I think it kind of moved away from the scratch night like crazy night that Liam had envisioned to something that was a bit more like, professional. So I do think that like, it had an impact, there were more people. I think, again, another sort of interesting dilemma was that the more people that joined Missimp, and more interested were like, so stuff like with gorilla burger, like, if you had, when it began, when I first was there, if you had like, 12 people in a room, you'd get up and do maybe like four or five scenes an evening. But at it's busiest. Like, you'd be lucky if you got like, two. And not in a bad like I remember one time I went to gorilla burger and I did a narra, like a word at time story. And a postcards game and I was like, I think I said like 10 words that whole night. Like, obviously I get it at the time was getting quite a lot performance opportunities through Missimp. So I'm not like moaning about it. But I could see how if you were someone in the community who like, didn't get those regular opportunities, for whatever reason, like actually having the community grow in size is like counter-intuitively might mean like less stage time. So it's just an interesting like dilemma, and one that I'm like, I think not the best qualified to speak up because it would be very much like an outside impression of what I think it was like. But yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:18:25

but in that it is an interesting perspective, though. And as with all things to do with oral history is not everything. summarising a little bit of the changes we've discussed. You were kind of talking about how it sort of feel more full. Do you think that Missimp began struggling with capacity during this this time?

Emily Brady 1:18:48

Yes, I would. Yes, in some ways.

Richard Minkley 1:18:52

I feel like that's a leading question. So

Emily Brady 1:18:55

yeah, I guess like, I mean, because the a lot of the stuff was being run out of the malt cross. And there was never like a show where we had to turn. That's shows would sell out quickly, like when there

were seats to be allotted. But stuff like drop-ins and gorilla burgers, I think there were a few where they started to feel quite crowded. And I remember like the one of the first drop-ins I taught there were about 30 people which is like a lot

Richard Minkley 1:19:26

that's a lot for drop in Wow.

Emily Brady 1:19:29

One of the first ones I did was like really, really busy. And it's like it's just I think it's an issue that Missimp will have to think about because you want it to be full and you want there to be people but equally you want everyone there to have a good time. Like I and especially it'll just it will be especially interesting to come back in the wake of like the pandemic when the, if eventually when Missimp does come back like how you will Like mitigate that because I remember when was it like Dave Escobedo came up, and he's a fantastic improviser. And he did a, he did a, he did three different courses on three different formats. And he was going to do a Thursday drop in. And I think that was one of the first times that the Thursday drop in, you actually had to buy tickets in advance. And you couldn't just show up on the door, because he was like, quite in demand, and people who couldn't do the courses wanted to do the drop in. But then that can be quite exclusionary, like if people like, obviously, if accessibility stuff, people don't have internet, but also like, I think there's something very different psychologically, if you just show up in a room and like, haven't paid and you just see how it is, if you have, as opposed to if you booked something in advance, like, I don't know, I think it's just having it being open, like drop in does make it more appealing to just like anyone, but it does have its drawbacks, as well. So it will be interesting to see what the executive do. Now that i'm not on it.

Richard Minkley 1:21:01

this sounds like someone else's problem. That's really interesting. God, there's loads of stuff we could talk about. But I'm going to try and bring it into a bit more of a focused end. we might not be able to get no actually maybe that'll be a little bit at the end. One of the big events in this is the 20th anniversary, and lots of things happened there. What do you remember the 20th anniversary?

Emily Brady 1:21:31

I was so tired. No, it was. Yeah, it was a really like, it was a really lovely event. And I was really like, in hindsight, I think I'm really pleased with how it all came together. And I think it strikes the right balance between like, celebrating, like, showcasing house teams, and celebrating the community, which I think is a balance that I think, yeah, the, the balance between house teams, and the community is one that is like really interesting with Missimp and it kind of goes back to my experience of like undergrad where people who were in the team got all the shows and the people who weren't didn't. But I think actually, in my opinion, that event kind of marked a turning point for it becoming a bit more balanced. And partially because of the 20th anniversary jam, which was my favourite event of the whole thing, which was upstairs at the malt cross and it featured loads of teams doing like 10 minutes snippets. But we put out a call that was like, if you want to form a team, just do it, just do it. And we really and like it. Not many people took us up on it, because I think the like house team like we're not ready to house team thing was a factor. But I think it was Dave, Duncan, Brendan and Kat set up a team called four chubby foxes. Five chubby foxes, sorry, I always do that. And they were great. And I actually think that that event opened up a lot more people being like, Oh, I can just like, do like, I can just start something and try this. And I think after the 20th anniversary, we started doing a lot more shows that were like two prov pairings that were just there for that one show and triple Decker, which was like, showcasing like newer, smaller teams. And and I think the success of the 20th anniversary, and like you had like a

few new little teams starting or like two prov starting did kind of inspire that shift. And I actually think that's the like, I mean, again, I'm not only exec anymore, so I can't possibly say but I think that sort of having those kind of variety pick and mix shows is a really good way to like balance that audience like community dynamic. But yes, the 20th anniversary was great. It was upstairs at the malt cross on a Thursday and I took pictures at the back. And then Friday night was the vortex and the Vox pops at the playhouse and then Saturday night was like a special smash night that I was in and rhymes against humanity. Like a double bill. And they were and it went It was really great. It was a lovely just like it was it really felt like a celebration. And it was really great. And then obviously the next weekend we had the first weekend of Nottingham Comedy Festival which was... woof. that was a time

Richard Minkley 1:24:32

Yeah. So this is very interesting. So as well as being tired which I can just hear in your voice

Emily Brady 1:24:42

Oh yeah, cuz me and me and Nick took a course as well at the at the Playhouse. We did it so that was a intro to improv and then Lloydie you did like an intro to musical improv straight afterwards.

Richard Minkley 1:24:54

Of course, why not do more. I feel like that's that's the theme of this. Why not More? Yes, and. yes, and, and, and. one of the things I'm interested in here is, yeah, we got loads of time. This sense of Missimp being a community, because you have been much more explicit in this conversation in that in that managing the dynamic between the community and the audience, and the teams and those not in teams. And it feels like there was something in the 20th anniversary, which acknowledged that a bit more like I believe there was a lunch, like a, like a fuddle or something. Is that right?

Emily Brady 1:25:39

I think so. At that point, I was so asleep.

Richard Minkley 1:25:43

Okay.

Emily Brady 1:25:44

I think Ben saw to it that there was like a community lunch on the Sunday. Yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:25:48

do you? Because it feels like you recognised it as a community. You were thinking about it as a community. And you were in this point, you were in the process of setting up a community interest company, weren't you?

Emily Brady 1:25:59

Yes, that took ages.

Richard Minkley 1:26:01

Yeah. But it's like you were being explicit about both community and organisation, and exec level responsibilities. And one of the things I'm trying to locate is when that first really started, like, when, if you were explicitly a community for the 20th anniversary, do you remember when it when the kind of switch flipped? And you understood what that Missimp was a community? Or was it always just a bunch of people fucking about?

Emily Brady 1:26:35

I think it was, to be honest, I think I always knew it was a community, like from the from the get go, I always had a sense that this was like a group of people who came together because there was something they were really passionate about. But I think for a while there, like the my understanding of the community kind of shifted, and like how to provide opportunities for people in the community. And actually, I think what the community wanted, and that's a really key thing that you kind of lose sight on as soon as you assume a position of power. Because some people want Missimp to just the I think this is a really interesting thing is that, some people want Missimp to be a room above a pub on a Thursday night where they hang out with their mates, and that's what they want. And then there are people who want to get up on stage and have like an audience applauding them. And that's what they want. And there's no way to satisfy everyone in a community. And I don't think Missimp will ever, due to the nature of the organisation, it will never satisfy everyone, because people are always going to want different and conflicting things. But I feel like that event was maybe where we realised we'd gotten the closest to satisfying everyone that we had, like audiences who saw shows that they loved, and really high like, and really happy venues and really like high engagement on social media and stuff. And, and we had people in the community feeling like they were a part of the group and like getting to go up on stage because as well, there was the, the jam on Thursday wasn't just like 10 minutes, lots of teams, there was also like a very big at the end, like get up and have a go, like, put your hand up and have a go. So a lot of people in the community who had wanted, like had been like, Oh, I want to do a team. But I like I shouldn't that that was when they got up to have a go. So I think that event was maybe when we realised we'd gotten the closest to finding the right balance. And I think it's worth, that this is what my impressions of things like the other people in the exec would have had different ideas and like we never articulated specifically like, Oh, how do we balance like the audience wants versus community wants and stuff. But I think that was the closest we got to like satisfying everyone. And it was a good like, I think that's why since Missimp moved to a model with shows that the nonsuch and like having shows like triple Decker and consenting partners, where you do have lots of different, like, ways that people can get up and do stuff without it being like, well, you were you were in the team. And the team has been auditioned for so like, unfortunately, there's nothing for you to do, which I don't want to say I don't think that was ever 100% the case. But I think maybe there was a period of time where it was perceived in the community that it was.

Richard Minkley 1:29:29

It's

Emily Brady 1:29:29

and it was definitely less community like opportunities.

Richard Minkley 1:29:33

It's fascinating to kind of we may not have said the word explicitly all the time, but there's a sense of balance in all of this conversation that we've been having. Unfortunately, I could ask you 1000 more questions. I have time for two. I'm going to squeeze in there really quickly.

Emily Brady 1:29:50

I think i'm in til half 12.

Richard Minkley 1:29:52

We I booked it until half 12 but the main thing is to get to 45 minutes and sometimes you need to stop and start and set things up and deal with With things, so there's no need to rush. two questions. The second one will become more apparent. But the first one is. And I'm asking everybody, why did you keep turning up? Like, because there's lots of people who turn up once, and then don't turn up anymore, but people kept turning up. And for you in particular, you kept turning up in a executive role where you took responsibility and action. So while you were in that role, why did you keep going? In Missimp? Is this sort of executive role?

Emily Brady 1:30:43

it's a really good question.

Richard Minkley 1:30:44

Thanks.

Emily Brady 1:30:45

No, no, no, no, I think I've never really thought about it. It wasn't really ever a decision. I don't ever feel like it was a, how do I articulate this? Like i First of all, I enjoyed it. Like I really did enjoy organising stuff. And I loved taking initiative with events and seeing them come together, and platforming people and creating shows like I really genuinely did enjoy the organising. And I love the art form. And also, like, the people I think, is the key thing. Like, there were so many people I met in Missimp, who I know will just be like friends for the rest of my life. And like people who I love so much, and now can't Picture My Life without them. And like, in rhymes against humanity as well, like there's, it's really had a great impact on me. I think it was something that like, I just I didn't consider for a long time, I could not do it. It just became like, I just did it. It just became as natural to me as like getting up in the morning, or like doing my PhD. It was just another thing that I did. And it was motivated by like, you know, love of the people love the art form, love of the community. And I think as well, I remember like the kindness that was extended to me when I first joined Missimp. And I really wanted to do that for other people. And I yeah, I always try my intention was always to just try and like make Missimp as welcoming and place as I should as I could so that like people could feel the same way that I did. And, and yes, actually, like, as we're recording this, I've stopped being in the exec as of August 2020.

Richard Minkley 1:32:43

Yeah.

Emily Brady 1:32:45

And like, obviously, the reason for that was because I need to finish my goddamn PhD.

Richard Minkley 1:32:51

And well, this is the other question I was gonna ask because you've stopped being in the exec, you're still part of the community in a broader sense. Obviously, no one's explicitly doing stuff with Missimp at the moment, because there's a pandemic on and I mean, apart from the online drinks and stuff, but that's not what we're talking about the moment. you decided to leave the exec. Why did you decide to stop?

Emily Brady 1:33:15

I hated everyone and I wanted to burn it to the ground.

Richard Minkley 1:33:18

Yes. I knew it. The truth is out.

Emily Brady 1:33:23

No, yeah. So um, so basically, I yeah, I'm doing my PhD and I entered the write up stage. And I took on a, I don't mean to like, I don't know what the word is like big myself up. But I took on a huge amount of stuff for Missimp. And so I was organising Nottingham Comedy Festival. And I was organising the all female workshops, I was doing the mailing list. And it was just like the constant stream of admin. And I also ended up no disrespect to anyone else in the exec. But I kind of became the like, I think I sort of fulfilled the role that I would just do it, like whatever it was, whether it was booking rooms, for a course, even if I wasn't always teaching it like or Facebook events, like if it wasn't getting done, I would just do it. And Marilyn used to say it's like the saying, You want something done, you give it to a busy person. I was so busy, I was just doing a huge amount of stuff. And I started getting quite like sloppy both in terms of the admin that I was doing and in terms of my PhD. And then a couple of like turning points happened. The first of which was that I got offered. Obviously at the moment there's a pandemic and a recession and all the teaching at the University of Nottingham got cut and I was offered some teaching in a secondary school and a position on an online journal. And I was like, I can't do both of these things and Missimp so I need to pick one of these two career things and like scrap the other one. And I couldn't decide. And then I kind of realised, well, what if I stopped doing Missimp, I could do both of these things. And then the other thing that happened was I was talking to my supervisors about my future. And basically, I'm looking to apply for like a post doctorate in September next year 2021. But you can't do a post doctorate at the same university that you've studied up before. And even if you do it in the same city, it looks weird. But so I couldn't carry on at the University of Nottingham. If I did that,

Richard Minkley 1:35:38

wow,

Emily Brady 1:35:39

so it's not like it's not 100% confirmed, but it's very likely that I would be moving out of Nottingham from September next year. So these two factors combined, and plus the fact that I'm just entering the write up stage, for my PhD, which is like, the worst time, it made sense, while everything was at a very, very low level of output. to step back, and the exec were great, because they were really understanding they were really lovely. And, and also, they sort of like said, Well, you could just like reduce your responsibilities. But I've realised over my time has been, the kind of person that I am, is that I will just like, create work for myself. And I will create things for me to do and like, if someone's struggling, I will be like, let me like, I'll do it, it's fine, I'll do it. And I can't, like if I give 10% to Missimp, it will creep it up. And therefore I know, I'll be doing the same again. And that's not a reflection on the way the company is run. It's reflection on me. But yeah, so I made the decision to stop. And obviously at the moment, like, the implications of that aren't clear. But one thing that I would say is that it was very so with like the exec I'm still obviously I'm friends with all of them. And I said like when you're hiring or hiring, like getting my replacement, like I'm happy to, like, look over the applications and tell you what I think especially because they'd be taking over quite a lot of my responsibilities. And, and I was really nervous the whole time that was happening because I wasn't on the exec so I couldn't see who was applying. But I was like, What if they send it to me, and it's like one person. And like, it's like one, you know, white guy? And that's it? And I'm like, or what if no one applies. And I obviously can't like go into details. But it was a really nice heartening full circle moment to see the amount of applications that there were like this. And like the sense that that like me leaving created an opening for like other people, I don't know who's been selected, I don't know what's going on. But like there's

an opening now for other people to like, carry on and take Missimp in a new direction. Because I think everyone who's joined the exec has left like a mark and has changed things for the better in some way. And now having me leaving, like leaves that open to the next few people. And also I'm really excited to just become like a member of like, just, I'm really excited to not be on the exec anymore is basically what I'm saying, like, I'm really looking forward to just like, showing up and being in shows. And obviously, I'll still always like be concerned with how Missimp is doing. But I'm just gonna be like, well, I'm performing to six people, and I'm having fun. So screw everything else.

Richard Minkley 1:38:51

I'm just imagining in the background, just like one more time from Hamilton, like, in the mansions of rest. It is a crime that I haven't been able to cover so many so much more with you. But, Emily, thank you so much for your time. I'll stop the recording now and stop the interview there. Unless I'm going to stop. Is there anything else you want to add before we stop recording? You don't have to, but if there's an opportunity here if you want to.

Emily Brady 1:39:21

Yeah, I'm just trying to think I feel like I feel like there's something glaring that I'm gonna The only thing that I wish I'd talked a little tiny bit more about was then the courses because I think they're quite okay. Like,

Richard Minkley 1:39:34

oh fuck, yeah.

Emily Brady 1:39:35

factor in how Missimp works.

Richard Minkley 1:39:37

I feel like I feel like I have taken up more of your time talking about gender stuff because there are so few people with that perspective.

Emily Brady 1:39:47

It's fine. But yeah, that's the one thing I would say I've taught like, I think now like four courses with Missimp. And every time it's been like an intro to improv course and I've taught them with Nick, Marilyn and Liam, and I think like, they've all been really great.

Richard Minkley 1:40:05

And there was someone else who taught one with.

Emily Brady 1:40:07

Oh, yeah, you.

Richard Minkley 1:40:10

Right, I'm gonna hit the, delete this interview. Fucking hell.

Emily Brady 1:40:17

It was such a delight. It didn't even feel like

Richard Minkley 1:40:19

Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, you keep digging, keep digging.

Emily Brady 1:40:23

But yeah, I will just say I think that the courses a really interesting element to the Missimp community as well outside of my personal enjoyment of teaching them like I love it. Because I think the the perception in the community again, sometimes is that if you do courses, then you get like performance opportunities. And the idea of having level courses in improv is such a thing. Like, it's such a thing, I have such mixed feelings about like, personally not as like a member of the exec or anything but like, I think having a level system implies that like, you're like 1, 2, 3, 4. And then like, if you reach for then you automatically get loads of performance opportunities. And, and I think like the thing with a level system is, if you like you will, you will get someone who comes along to level one and they are just like really naturally good at improv. And improv is 100% a skill that you can learn and hone. But I also think there's a degree of like, talent to it. And you'll get someone who comes along and a level one having never done improv before. And they might be better than someone who has done a level four, who has been doing it for years, they might be better than the teacher like God, that's happened to me where I'm just like, oh, okay, you're on the level one. And we were already running rooms around me. Cool.

Richard Minkley 1:41:40

I hate that.

Emily Brady 1:41:43

But I think it's a really interesting, I think it's the way that things are done in the improv at the moment is just it's level courses. But again, I think in a community interest organisation, it takes on an interesting dynamic, because it might be seen as something that's like gatekeeping opportunities if you can afford to do the course. And, and Missimp is pretty good at having like scholarships. That's the Colin Bbarnfather Memorial Scholarship, which was before I joined. But every single course I've always taught, there's always been like, two up for grabs, and people have just been like, that doesn't apply to me, like it does. But I think the courses are another really key part of Missimp. That is interesting. It'll be interesting to see how it develops. And like, what the syllabus says about how Missimp is at the time as well, like, I feel like there's the syllabus has changed. So too, has Missimp changed. And the I had one of the thing that I was gonna say about courses. I can't remember what it is. But yeah, I think like, I think the level system over time will change, like not in Missimp, specifically, but like globally, because I think it has Yeah, it does have its drawbacks. But it's the best we've got at the moment. And I've enjoyed teaching the level ones when I have. So and I think Yeah, one thing that will be that I hope in future is that like there'll be more different teachers as well. Like people like you, Richard, who I had so much fun on that blessed six weeks with.

Richard Minkley 1:43:25

We, we learned some things. Yeah, it was good time.

Emily Brady 1:43:28

had a time. Yeah. I swear there was something else I wanted to say about courses, but I just I can't remember. So it's gone forever.

Richard Minkley 1:43:34

You gonna have to write a book one day. put it that way.

Emily Brady 1:43:38

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:43:39

Oh, one quick question, because I will regret it if I don't ask you. What was your PhD on?

Emily Brady 1:43:47

My PhD is on African American women photographers in the civil rights movement.

Richard Minkley 1:43:53

And I am sure we can have another 18 hours conversation about that, but we won't. Emily, thank you so much for your time. I'm going to stop recording now.

10. Liam Webber

10.1. Interview 1 of 2

a) Part 1 of 3

7th March 2020

Disclaimer

While still very active in nottingham's improv scene, Liam Webber is no longer part of the community's executive group.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

jam, Daniel, Liam, improv, year, remember, Corner, Fringe, Nottingham, horrendous, chairs, burger, February, scenes, space, university, nicest possible way, Spartacus, recording, nick

SPEAKERS

Together(ish), Richard Minkley, Liam Webber

Richard Minkley 00:00

So we are recording. It is Saturday, 7th March 2020 at 10:19am. This is Richard Minkley interviewing Liam Webber.

Liam Webber 00:12

Hey.

Richard Minkley 00:12

Hey. For the mission improbable History Project. Cool. So... I don't know why I feel like I need to say the "Liam", just in case you think I'm asking someone else a question but

Liam Webber 00:26

Yep.

Richard Minkley 00:26

Liam, what is your first memory of Missimp?

Liam Webber 00:31

It would be at The Corner? I couldn't tell you the year.

Richard Minkley 00:44

What do you remember happening at The Corner?

Liam Webber 00:45

So we were... So I was in a band at the time and a friend of mine I was in the band with, called Daniel, I'd convinced him to come along to this improv night. This like, an improv, like. Everything was jams back then. There were only, Missimp only ran as jams. And then once a month it would be gorilla burger, which was a jam but you could drink. So I'd done improv at university, and sketch and stand up at university, and I was doing a fair bit of stand up around the place. And I just found like improv in Nottingham. I probably Google it or whatever. Found Missimp's old and horrendous website.

Richard Minkley 01:34

What was that old and horrendous website?

Liam Webber 01:36

Oh my god, I, well Nick's gonna listen to this, I feel sorry for. Hi, Nick. But the website was appalling. It was just like, Ah, it was a visual assault, is what I'd described it as. It was like really just like horrendous, like, just like, [quiet scream] but on a screen. crazy. Yeah. So, but

Richard Minkley 02:06

But you still came?

Liam Webber 02:08

I still came. I mean, I, you know, I'm not... Yeah. You know, I wanted to keep doing improv. I'd enjoyed a university. I think I'd probably come back from my first Fringe, where I was doing sketch and improv and just wanted to like, keep... keep going. I really enjoyed the first Fringe I did. And so it would probably be the February after that. Like, I'm pretty sure. No, so see, I came once, so I, so, sorry. Yeah, we'll go back. So I came once with Daniel. And we came and we did like the two hour session, and then we left and I didn't go back for six months.

Richard Minkley 02:51

Okay.

Liam Webber 02:54

It's hard to tell you exactly why I don't.

Richard Minkley 02:57

Well, so

Liam Webber 02:58

The Corner like I got I don't know. Were you there? Were you with us when we were at The Corner?

Richard Minkley 03:02

I wasn't with you when you're at The Corner. However, I do remember The Corner...

Liam Webber 03:06

You don't understand.

Richard Minkley 03:08

I remember filming something in The Corner. And it not being a pleasant room.

Liam Webber 03:14

No, it was horrible.

Richard Minkley 03:16

Tell me what was... go back to that first, in fact. So you say your first memory was of a jam?

Liam Webber 03:24

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 03:24

What was the room like?

Liam Webber 03:28

Well, I mean that The Corner itself was like, it was just like, didn't have a ton of lighting. Its where, there's like, the best pizza place in Nottingham is now residing there. And this space is so nice now. And then it didn't and it's not like they've put a lot of work into it. But it was, it just felt like, you know when you walk into places and it's like it's in a state of decay. It was kind of like, so, it's kind of like the ceiling here a bit.

Richard Minkley 03:56

For those at home, the ceiling here. We're in the Malt Cross at the minute which is always struggling with some moisture related issues.

Liam Webber 04:04

Yeah

Richard Minkley 04:05

So the ceiling is a little bit... moldy.

Liam Webber 04:08

Yeah. And like, I'm not like, I'm not like a handsy kind of person. I don't really know about these things. But you know when you look at walls, and you can tell there's something like going on there that's not quite right? Like the colouring is not quite what you want it to be. Yeah, it was kind of like that the lighting wasn't great. It was, kind of like, it was pretty, like, space wise, it was quite good in terms of like, how wide the space was. And the chairs was super weird.

Richard Minkley 04:39

What's a super weird chair?

Liam Webber 04:42

Well, I don't know. They felt like office chairs, but maybe just a bit too wide. Just a bit. Just a bit too what like...

Richard Minkley 04:51

I've never heard anybody describe the chair like that before, that's really interesting.

Liam Webber 04:53

And they had like weird like, in my head like, they were almost like egg chairs. I feel like this can't be right. I feel like I must of like, I've not interrogated this memory for a long time. But like they were like

blue and like, somehow, like, circular in the back. I don't know. But yeah, that was weird. It was a weird space. It was really weird space and... grim.

Richard Minkley 05:19

Do remember who else was there?

Liam Webber 05:23

So Nick and Marilyn definitely were.

Richard Minkley 05:27

Were they leading the jam?

Liam Webber 05:30

I think Nick was, yeah. I think Nick was. Yeah, it was Nick. Nick definitely lead us in a round of like Spartacus names.

Richard Minkley 05:39

Yes. For the recording, what counts as a [game] of Spartacus names.

Liam Webber 05:44

Oh, so like, you step forward. You say "Hi, I'm Liam", and you do an action along with that introduction. And then everyone else in the circle steps forward copies that action and goes...

Together(ish) 05:55

"No, I'm Liam"

Liam Webber 05:57

And you go around the circle that way. And I remember because I was the asshole who sat down. Yeah, and that's the only time I've ever done it.

Richard Minkley 06:12

Yeah.

Liam Webber 06:12

Regretted it immediately.

Richard Minkley 06:14

Ok.

Liam Webber 06:14

And ever since then I've been very small and coy in my Spartacus naming.

Richard Minkley 06:21

So, you were there with your friend Daniel, are you happy to give us a surname for Daniel or would you prefer not?

Liam Webber 06:27

I mean, I can Yeah, Daniel Pots but he, like, that's the only thing you ever came to.

Richard Minkley 06:33

No, but the other thing he came to. What was the name of the band that you were in?

Liam Webber 06:37

Oh, the band that was in what was called The Gorgeous Chans.

Richard Minkley 06:40

The Gorgeous Chans?

Liam Webber 06:41

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 06:42

Amazing.

Liam Webber 06:43

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 06:44

I just want that recorded for prosperity.

Liam Webber 06:45

It was named after like a... there's a bad Jackie Chan movie, early in his career called Gorgeous.

Richard Minkley 06:54

Oh, okay.

Liam Webber 06:55

And that was after like two days of like, trying to work out we should call ourselves, that was what we landed on. But, the music was better than the name suggests. I swear.

Richard Minkley 07:06

Well, okay, so you came to that?

Liam Webber 07:09

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 07:10

Like six month gap. Came back again.

Liam Webber 07:13

Yeah, I think I mean...

Richard Minkley 07:13

Do you remember...

Liam Webber 07:14

So I think that must have been in the like... what year did I go to the Fringe... So i went to university...

Richard Minkley 07:19

Because you said that this was,... You carried on improv after university, so was it, sort of, university and then the following year you went to...

Liam Webber 07:22

I would travel back down. So like, I, so I went to University of Southampton and I dropped out after after one.

Richard Minkley 07:32

Okay.

Liam Webber 07:33

So the first year, what year would that have been? How old am I now? 26. So I would have been 19 in 2013?

Richard Minkley 07:48

So if you're 26 now...

Liam Webber 07:49

Summer of 2013, I would have been 19. So that would be...

Richard Minkley 07:54

We can kind of do this when you were about 19...

Liam Webber 07:57

So then it was like 2014. So it would have been, like, maybe September 2014, October 2014 that I first walked into a Missimp event.

Richard Minkley 08:06

Okay, so...

Liam Webber 08:07

I think and then it would be, yeah. Because then that's...

Richard Minkley 08:10

So, 2013/2014 ish.

Liam Webber 08:12

No, it would definitely be 2014.

Richard Minkley 08:14

2014.

Liam Webber 08:14

Yeah. I've done it. I've done the maths. So it would be 2014. And it would have been like, September, October 2014 that I dragged Daniel along, because that would be straight after the Fringe. And I was

very, like, "I really want to do it". And I was also in a new job then as well. So I had a bit more disposable income, so I could afford to do it.

Richard Minkley 08:32

What job were you?

Liam Webber 08:34

So I just got my job working in a science lab at Blue Coat Academy.

Richard Minkley 08:38

Okay, very, very good.

Liam Webber 08:41

So I did that. And I didn't come back until about February of that year, of the year after, so that would be February 2015. And that's when I would say that I started coming with relative regularity.

Richard Minkley 08:54

Do you know why you came back? So one of the things I'm interested in this is that there is, like... The reason people turn up to begin with is one thing, but the reason people keep turning up is another. So what brought you back in 2015?

Liam Webber 09:11

I mean, I'd say the same thing that took me there in the first place, like, in the nicest possible way, I don't think anyone in the room was particularly interested in me as a person when I first like when I was in there. When me and Daniel when it was the two of us, you know, we were both fucking 19 year old kids. Me especially. I'm, you know, I was a fucking fire in a hand basket, you know.

Richard Minkley 09:42

What do you mean. So what's a fire in a handbasket 19 year old like?

Liam Webber 09:45

Well, just like brash and cocky and arrogant and "I'm good at this. I'm really good at this". I wasn't particularly good. I wasn't good at it at all, but, like I was quite funny, but I wouldn't say I was good at improv. That was the note I got at least. And...

Richard Minkley 10:09

Wait, you got a note like that?

Liam Webber 10:11

Not... slightly later on, but yeah, someone said that I am one of the funniest people he's ever met, but not a good improviser.

Richard Minkley 10:23

That's fascinating.

Liam Webber 10:26

And I've spent the last five years trying to prove that person wrong.

Richard Minkley 10:32

Okay. Okay, but it feels like we've jumped ahead in the timeline a little

Liam Webber 10:37

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 10:38

So you came back in 2015? Was it The Corner again in February?

Liam Webber 10:41

Yes. Still at The Corner. I mean, we were still at The Corner until end of 2015 start of 2016 maybe I think is when we moved across to the Malt Cross.

Richard Minkley 10:52

Okay. So if you were in there February you probably about there for a year. So

Liam Webber 10:59

Yeah, yeah.

Richard Minkley 11:00

You know, a little bit less.

Liam Webber 11:01

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 11:03

What was a jam? You said that they were mostly jams there. Was it, sorry, you mentioned this, I'm just trying to remember you said it was mostly jams...

Liam Webber 11:15

Yeah thats what they did.

Richard Minkley 11:16

... and monthly gorilla burgers, which is very similar to the setup we've got now where there's one every Thursday, and one of those those days a month is gorilla burger.

Liam Webber 11:26

Yeah. So gorilla burger's kind of stayed in the same vein that it was at The Corner. Like, and in a similar way, like, there would always be a lot more of like... so what I remember being, like... The thing that I remember is that like the difference between a Thursday jam and a Thursday gorilla burger, in terms of the content was minimal. Right. It was pretty much the same. You'd play some games, you'd do some scenes. Occasionally, there'd be like a vague focus. But most of the time, like, that vague vague focus would be like, "This week we're going to do PG scenes. Okay, so no swearing no like, I mean do PG scenes". And that would then it would just be you do the same jam, right. So you'd still like play some games, do some scenes. But that would be this like, vague thing that you had to like, so "we're doing a jam, but it's a PG jam". You know that that would be like, that would be how I would describe what like the regular Thursday nights were like,

Richard Minkley 12:32

So was it a bit like, a theming thing rather than an objective or...

Liam Webber 12:35

Yeah i think so. And more often than not, it would be like, you know, you do some scenes... Can I just pause briefly, so like this bit doesn't get recorded is that?

Richard Minkley 12:52

Yeah, I can pause that for a moment. I'm just going to stop the recording.

b) Part 2 of 3

7th March 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, jams, scenes, fucking, ran, malt, rhymes, improv, problematic, musical improv, improviser, funny, remember, pimping, Edinburgh, idea, stage, nick, whiz bang, point

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Liam Webber

Richard Minkley 00:00

So we are back at part two of part one with Liam Webber being interviewed by Richard Minkley. It is Saturday 7th March 10:35am. So, we were talking about The Corner. I don't remember where we got to. What was a jam like?

Liam Webber 00:26

Yeah, so it was like gorilla burger, right. It was like you'd come in and you'd do some warm ups normally do Marilyn's stretches, you'd do Spartacus style names. We'd play whiz bang, or a variation there of a whiz bang.

Richard Minkley 00:45

So, for the recording, I know you, you're an expert at this because you explain it regularly, what's whiz bang?

Liam Webber 00:51

So whiz bang is like a pulse passing exercise, where you're standing in a circle and you pass like a pulse around the circle. So whiz is the pulse and that will go around the circle. So if you're interested in, the circle would be like whiz whiz whiz whiz whiz whiz and you'd go all the way around the circle, and then bang changes direction. So you go whiz bang and then it comes back to you and you go whiz the other way. So it's like you can only whiz in one direction until someone bangs and then there are like, other things on top of that thing, like other little rules you can play and like they're, you know, one of the things that Missimp did very heavily at that time was it played different genre versions of these games. So you'd play like, whiz bang but you're all Cowboys, and it's like, ye-haw ye-haw ye-haw papow. Or there's a Shakespearean one that's like Mi' lady or Mi' sir, depending on who stood next to you. And then, I can't remember what I can't remember what the reverse direction of the Shakespeare one and all I know is like the wibble is like "I run thee through" and you poke them with a sword and it jumps that, skips that person.

Richard Minkley 01:54

Okay. And then its, is it...?

Liam Webber 02:00

And then it would go into like either scenes or games depending on like the mood of the person who was "running it", and I put running in like inverted commas. It would be like be Parky or Nick, you know, one of them would be like "okay so it's a..." you know and they decide what we're going to do. I don't think, yeah Lloydie wasn't really doing too much then. Not when I first joined it, [he] wasn't running to me too much stuff.

Richard Minkley 02:32

So it'd be mainly Nick and Parky running the session.

Liam Webber 02:36

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 02:36

Okay.

Liam Webber 02:37

So those two would be running them and we would, Yeah. And then those two would host gorilla burger as well. And if my brain remembers correctly, the like weighting was so Parky ran more jams than gorilla burgers and Nick ran more gorilla burgers than jams but it seemed fairly interchangeable as to who fancied up on the night really

Richard Minkley 03:00

Okay, okay. So you kept coming back to those. I'm interested because there was like a big six month gap.

Liam Webber 03:08

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 03:09

Which I think many people might be surprised to hear of that. Is there a particular reason? Not necessarily particularly the reason why you didn't come back but like, Is there anything in that six month gap which would help understand or even why you just came back after so long?

Liam Webber 03:25

I mean, like, you know, one of the things was, it was a Thursday evening activity and the time between like, you know, especially like then, like in that... So I've come along in that September and then the same September my band will have played Bestival, and in that October, we went on like a UK tour and stuff like that. And so like, though, there would have been like mitigating circumstances around like, you know, if the band were doing these things, then we would need to be practising on a regular basis, and stuff like that. And, you know, like improv rehearsals right, like, if you're practising at that kind of intensity or traveling to Swansea for a show and then traveling back while doing a nine to five job, the space within your life to like do stupid things and an extra like things isn't huge. In fact, I feel that very much now, where improv takes up all of that space within my life and the actual space to do other things isn't really there. And I think that that will have been part of it. I think part of it as well would have been like... You know, I was like I said, like, I was 19, I just come back from doing the Fringe. I thought I was really fucking funny. I thought I was dead smart. And so like, you know, and as well like I was really like, in like quite a difficult point in my life at the same time. Because I just dropped out of university which really like destroyed a lot of my like confidence and my self belief and

you know growing up a lot of my self worth was in like how smart I was. And so then to fail at that really kind of wrecked me. So that mixture of like me being completely insecure on a genuine like, emotional level. And also coming to a place where everyone was these huge characters you know, first time you walk into a room with Nick Tyler your like who is this fucking pirate? Like I think it brought out like a brashness in me and like a "I need to be really fucking good. I need to like impress I need to be funny. I need to be all these things", which made me probably like quite a lot to be around really, like realistically, I think I, like... You know, I think I was probably just like... And so like, I don't think, I think the first time I went like, you know, I was with Daniel as well and when there's two of you, and you go, and the two of you are chatting, and then we didn't go to the pub with them afterwards, because me and Daniel were both like, "do you want to go?", and he was like, "do you want to go?", and when I was like, "do you want to go?", And he was like, "do you want to go?" and we were like, "let's just not go then", right. Like, neither of us wanted to make that decision. So unlike, as well, like I was 19 I never had friends who weren't my own age.

Richard Minkley 06:35

Yeah.

Liam Webber 06:36

Right. Like and then to suddenly be hanging out with people who are like 30-40 just feels weird and you don't really know how to walk that line. You don't really and I guess like, maybe if I'd had like more of a... what's the word, like... overt, like, "No, you should definitely come, please come", or like someone be like, interested in me like "Who are you? Where are you from? How'd you find out about us? Why you fucking here?". Like, just like, if I'd had that perhaps more overtly the first time maybe I would have stayed on. And I think, like, that experience actually really like affected the way that I operated maybe 18 months to two years later, when I became more involved and stuff like that. In terms of like, you know, if there's a new person in the room, I need to go and introduce myself, I need to make sure that, I need to find out why they're here because I remembered being feeling a bit like "meh", when I first came along. The reason I came back was the same reason I came in the first place. I like doing it, you know, I like performing on stage. And if there's not, I've always found that if that if I don't have that outlet in my life, I really, really struggle and one of the reasons I struggled in Southampton was because I didn't have a performance outlet that was enough of my life, you know. I was away from the band and doing a physics degree and didn't really get in with the comedy society people until maybe like march/April time. Like I was going...

Richard Minkley 08:13

Quite late in an academic year.

Liam Webber 08:14

Yeah, I was I was going the whole time but like I wouldn't say that I made like close friends until we did our first like show which was in March, right, like. And then and then people were like, "Oh, no, actually, you know your", because I always think that like for one reason or other I'm bang average in a rehea... like at performing and batting average in a rehearsal room, bang average in like a drop in and bang average in like a fucking jam, but I'm good in front of an audience. I don't know why that is exactly. But I think like, I definitely feel it within myself that when there's an audience, I feel suddenly a lot better and more at ease with the performing element. And I've found that a lot through like everything, right. I think some people are like, "Oh, why are you getting at improv" and I think it's not necessarily that I'm good at improv it's that I'm at ease in front of an audience, perhaps more so than I am at ease in like a rehearsal room or a drop in. And that's, at the end of the day, where you get

judged that if you're good at this or not, is like whether you like, look comfortable in front of a roomful of people.

Richard Minkley 09:19

So this must be torture for you what's happening right now.

Liam Webber 09:22

I'm not gonna lie I would rather be doing a show, yeah.

Richard Minkley 09:26

Fair enough.

Liam Webber 09:26

But you know, its okay. And also like, I have, my personality is evened out so much more than it had like. I was a mess seven years ago, in a lot of ways I was a mess. And now I feel like a lot less of a mess. I probably still am a fucking raging shambles of a human being really if you were to look at it for any great length of time, but I'm definitely more like mellowed out and evened out, and... Whereas this, yeah, this would be like, fucking torture for me. And when I was 19 and 20 I'd have just been like, I would have been so intensely, like, "I gotta be funny. I got to make them laugh. I can't show them that I'm weak", you know? Which I've kind of, which I, well, hopefully I've given up a little bit of that.

Richard Minkley 10:17

Well, the interview is young. We'll see how we go.

Liam Webber 10:21

Yeah. Have me, weeping by the end.

Richard Minkley 10:25

So we've got a kind of cross section of the 'The Corner' days. Do you remember the first time you came for a jam in the Malt Cross?

Liam Webber 10:37

No.

Richard Minkley 10:41

So it wasn't necessarily that big of an event?

Liam Webber 10:44

No, it was. It was a big event, but I just don't. So the thing that I remember is the Rhymes auditions, which is why I say like, it must have been a year or so afterwards, right, like...

Richard Minkley 10:56

So.

Liam Webber 10:57

This is really where my relationship with Lloydie started, really. Relationship being like, we're not a couple but like relationship being like,

Richard Minkley 11:05

Okay.

Liam Webber 11:06

Where like, because obviously like over the last five years or whatever he's been one of the people I've collaborated with most.

Richard Minkley 11:13

So we've kind of gone over a lot of things very quickly in one sentence. So what are, the first thing you remember really about the Malt Cross, you said ,was the Rhymes.

Liam Webber 11:22

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 11:22

What is Rhymes?

Liam Webber 11:23

So Rhymes Against Humanity is, was Missimp's first regularly rehearsing house team. It was formed out of pretty much the regular people in Missimp. But the idea was that it was a musical team and Lloydie had reached out to Sam Plumber, who was a pianist friend? I don't know I think they met at like student radio or something. Because Lloydies a radio dude. And Sam was in demand for the student union radio something. I think they must have got talking, he found out Sam's a musician and a pianist. And so Lloydie brought Sam over and wanted to start like a musical improv team who did what, essentially what baby wants candy do, right. So Baby Wants Candy were, are an American improv group who started in Chicago but now have teams in Chicago, New York and LA. And they do an improvised musical. They do like a fully improvised musical from scratch. And they're like Edinburgh heroes, right. Like everyone, every improviser has seen a Baby Wants Candy show in Edinburgh, right. Like that's, that's, if you've been to Edinburgh, you've seen a Baby Wants Candy show, right.

Richard Minkley 12:43

Is that one of the staples of the Edinburgh Fe... Is it Edinburgh general or Fringe?

Liam Webber 12:47

Edinburgh Fringe Festival, yeah. So they come over every Edinburgh Fringe and do it and that. They were the first people to really doing any like long form musicals at the Fringe. Yeah, and their like fucking funny, you know. Their cast was in... their original cast had people like Al Samuels and Peter Gwynn and Tim Sniffen who are like, fucking like legends, right. But they're incredible performers. If you watch their performances...

Richard Minkley 13:17

Did you know about Baby Wants Candy before Rhymes Against Humanity?

Liam Webber 13:20

No. Hmm, did I? Oh, that's a good question.

Richard Minkley 13:25

Because you said that "Oh, yeah. We", you said you spent time in Edinburgh and you've done an Edinburgh show.

Liam Webber 13:30

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 13:31

But this is now after that. So I'm just wondering.

Liam Webber 13:35

You know, I think we saw Baby Wants Candy when I was up there. I'm pretty sure we saw them when I was... When I was up there with the Southampton University lot. I'm pretty sure we went along to one of their shows because it was before they moved to the venue that they're in now. It was still, like, expensive, but they were great. I think I had seen them. Yeah, because that was probably one of the conversations mean, like... So the reason Lloydie asked me to be Rhymes wasn't because I'm a good improviser, at that point, it was because I was a musician.

Richard Minkley 14:09

Okay.

Liam Webber 14:10

Right. So it was, you know, I played the saxophone. I had been in lots of musical theatre growing up. That was kind of like what we did, we... I was in a theatre group that like, mainly produced musical theatre and a lot of what we did was devised musical theatre. So a lot of what we were doing in Rhymes, I had like, six odd years of experience doing in like a different way, but like, you know, like, relevant experience.

Richard Minkley 14:43

So, do you remember, what was, do you remember the audition? Do you remember which...

Liam Webber 14:49

Yeah, we were, so, you know. So there's like, so at the sorry. my nose is clogged. Gonna make a horrible noise for your microphone.

Richard Minkley 14:59

Its alright. This is gonna be history.

Liam Webber 15:02

Perfect. So we're in this, we're in like the workshop room now. But there's the two rooms downstairs. Yeah. So for the first however long, Rhymes rehearsed in, like, the room downstairs, I think the reason we got that room initially was because there was a piano in there. But that piano was horribly out of tune. Like horrendously out of tune, so Sam would always have to bring his piano in like. We were in that downstairs room. And there were a lot of people there.

Richard Minkley 15:33

When you say a lot of people...?

Liam Webber 15:34

A lot of people for the time, right, like,

Richard Minkley 15:36

I was going to say, what's the scale of a lot of people at that time?

Liam Webber 15:39

I mean, like, you know, jams at The Corner regularly had anywhere between like maybe 6 and 12 people. Gorilla Burgers would go anywhere up to like 18 maybe. You know. And I think you had like maybe 12 or 13 people. Probably a few more actually.

Richard Minkley 16:00

At the audition?

Liam Webber 16:00

At the audition.

Richard Minkley 16:01

Okay.

Liam Webber 16:02

And that audition really set the tone for how a lot of the auditions were done after it.

Richard Minkley 16:08

What's the tone?

Liam Webber 16:10

Well in terms of like, it laid out the blueprint that like Vox Pops followed, That Epic followed, right, like, The Vortex followed. Like, a lot of the Missimp teams that came after that took the way that Rhymes did it.

Richard Minkley 16:23

Whats the way that Rhymes did it?

Liam Webber 16:26

It was more of an open workshop than like, skills based like, "you are auditioning". You know, we warmed up, it was like a fucking jam. We warmed up. They did some like, musical improv exercises where theres, you'd do some musical improv scenes. And that was about it. And then, it was split over two weeks. You had to go to both weeks. [...]

Richard Minkley 16:53

Really?

Liam Webber 16:54

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 16:54

Okay.

Liam Webber 16:56

Yeah. And...

Richard Minkley 16:58

I'm assuming you've got in.

Liam Webber 16:59

I did. Yeah. And that team at the time, all sorts of controversy around it. I remember well.

Richard Minkley 17:13

What in the early days?

Liam Webber 17:14

Well, in terms of like the Rhymes casting, you know, [-] Nick wasn't cast, but I can't remember if that was because Nick didn't want to do musical improv. I know he's not a particular fan of singing. Yeah, I think the original team would have been me. Well, Lloydie obviously, me, Jamie, Marilyn, Jeanette, Phil, Parky, Martin. Maybe there's someone else.

Richard Minkley 18:07

So that was your first experience really improvising in the Malt Cross?

Liam Webber 18:12

That's the one that I can remember. So we might have been like, but like, the transition to the Malt Cross and the starting of Rhymes were, they coincided, right.

Richard Minkley 18:25

Yeah.

Liam Webber 18:25

Like, probably happened within the same month or two like span.

Richard Minkley 18:30

But, so you've moved into a different place. Did the improv change much for being in a new space?

Liam Webber 18:37

So I wouldn't say that the format but like. I wouldn't say that the format of what was happening in the room necessarily changed a lot but what did change was the number of people coming.

Richard Minkley 18:51

Really? Up or down?

Liam Webber 18:53

Up. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 18:54

So came to the Malt Cross, who...

Liam Webber 18:56

Yeah, within like, so who...

Richard Minkley 18:58

Not who, not, not who were they, but like, what was it that got people coming?

Liam Webber 19:03

The fact we were no longer in fucking hellhole. Yeah, it is funny. Um, yeah and then like this room was really decked out. Like, it would be it was brand new, pretty much. I don't know how Lloydie, like, so Lloydie was the one who like managed us getting this space. I don't know how he managed. I don't know like what that conversation was but this room was like brand new and so it didn't have any of the like mould or crappy bits, you know. The water didn't drip from the ceiling then. So, you know, it was it was nice and it was light, it was warm. And like that made a huge difference and that made it like a really big difference and like if you look at like people who came. So I would say like my contemporaries, really, when I started, like the people who started roughly with me, will be Katie Mitchell and Minder.

Richard Minkley 19:09

It's funny that, isn't it?

Liam Webber 20:09

Okay. It would be the three, like, the three of us were like, people who were there at the very, like, the tail end of The Corner, Really. Because then there were people like Jamie and Phil and...

Richard Minkley 20:22

Jamie and Phil joined after you came to...?

Liam Webber 20:24

No, no, Jamie and Phil were there like before us and then I always think of like, as being kind of the last few people who really were at The Corner.

Richard Minkley 20:36

Do you remember some of the people who came, who'd begun to come around the time that you moved to the Malt Cross? No, is an acceptable answer.

Liam Webber 20:49

Yeah, I don't know. I'm trying to think because now, thinking about it, maybe Pat and Julia are kinda. Pat and Julie were there before, a little bit before me, I think. They were already members of the community obviously like I know of people have Rupes and stuff who'd been there forever. Who came after me? Who's still in?

Richard Minkley 21:11

I tell you, we can probably figure it out as we go.

Liam Webber 21:13

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 21:14

So...

Liam Webber 21:14

In my head, you're kind of in that bracket. But I don't think that might...

Richard Minkley 21:17

I was gonna say, we are beginning to approach the bit where I appear. But it's interesting. So we are...

Liam Webber 21:25

Oh dear, *fiddles with microphone* Just tapping.

Richard Minkley 21:27

Just punching the oral history in the head there. This is interesting. So it's about 2016.

Liam Webber 21:33

Yep.

Richard Minkley 21:36

You're in the Malt Cross, and you. This is one of the weird things, we are in a world where you've been doing that kind of regular, there are drop ins that are very much like gorilla burger and actual gorilla burger in The Corner. And you've taken that and it's now in the Malt Cross.

Liam Webber 21:54

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 21:56

How long did that continue without, I was gonna say without interruption, but did that just go on and on and on and on, or, like, when did things change?

Liam Webber 22:05

So they were called jams, right. They were called we call them jams at the time, like the Thursdays with jams.

Richard Minkley 22:14

They weren't drop-ins?

Liam Webber 22:15

No. That was a conscious rebrand.

Richard Minkley 22:18

Okay.

Liam Webber 22:20

Later. And I got blamed for actually changing, I don't know how true it is.

Richard Minkley 22:26

Okay.

Liam Webber 22:27

I got blamed for changing the way we do drop ins. By simply the way that I ran them. Which I don't know if it's true or not.

Richard Minkley 22:40

Okay.

Liam Webber 22:41

But I feel like that comes a bit later because...

Richard Minkley 22:44

I'm going to put a pin in that.

Liam Webber 22:45

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 22:46

Because you've just said you were running jams. So what is that the change? Like, at what point...

Liam Webber 22:55

No, no, no, no, no, no. So my starting to run jams would have come the year after.

Richard Minkley 23:00

2017?

Liam Webber 23:01

So if we were at 2016 now, yeah, no, it would be like a, there's like a Christmas party or Benedetta's birthday party or I was...

Richard Minkley 23:10

Do you remember Benedetta's surname?

Liam Webber 23:12

Perich. P, e, r, i, c, h.

Richard Minkley 23:15

Benedetta Perich. So she was around at that point. Sorry, I just thought I'd get that before we move on but there was some sort of Christmas party?

Liam Webber 23:23

But this is like, you know, we've just skipped ahead a year. Right. But it was definitely winter. It was definitely a Benedetta's house. Benedetta's old house because I remember being sat in the kitchen with Nick for ages, and he and he was the one who said you need to be running jams at that point.

Richard Minkley 23:46

Yeah.

Liam Webber 23:48

And I was like, "nah". And then Pete Cliff was there. And, who's, like. So maybe it's even, even later than that. But Pete was there and he was like "Yeah, no, you need to be doing it because you're good at it". And i was like, "Oh, okay". Listen, and then I that's when that would be when I started. After that would be when I started running, like when I first ran jam, or a drop in.

Richard Minkley 24:14

So is this 2017 or 2018?

Liam Webber 24:20

So...

Richard Minkley 24:21

Because the chronology I've got at the minute is that, 2016 is about the year where you shift over from The Corner to The Malt Cross. Then that goes on and I think the way you've said it is the 2017, the Christmas, the winter between 2016 - 2017 you had this party at Bernadette's house. And she and there you were talking to Nick and he said you should run some drop ins, so would have been 20...

Liam Webber 24:47

That feels, like, that feels about right.

Richard Minkley 24:50

So it would have been 2017 you started running drop ins.

Liam Webber 24:53

I reckon probably the first the first one I ran would be then yeah, but there was still called jams.

Richard Minkley 24:59

Okay. Because then you also said that the way you ran jams, you were blamed, which is an interesting choice of words, for changing the way that jams worked.

Liam Webber 25:12

Yeah. Which again, like, I like, I personally think it probably been like, moving that way, like, because we had so many newer people coming and we were running way fewer courses than we run at the moment right. Like, you know, it was a task to get on a structured course and there's... We don't need to talk about the actual courses themselves. Because they were interesting, but...

Richard Minkley 25:40

Would it be safe to say that they've improved since?

Liam Webber 25:45

Yes.

Richard Minkley 25:45

Okay. Um.

Liam Webber 25:47

I mean, again, like, but that's me tooting my own horn because I had a lot to do with a lot of the, this other stuff. But yeah, so like the structured course, and like don't get me wrong, the level one course

has doesn't change too much. It's still, you know, that was pretty solid. I think it was a level two class that I had issues with.

Richard Minkley 26:07

We've skipped ahead again, I'm trying to figure out. What did you do in that jam that got you blamed for changing things?

Liam Webber 26:14

It was just the structure, it was the structured nature of it. So like, I'm, I'm a relatively obsessive person. And so like, rather than it being like, come in, and like do some warm ups, and then we'll do some scenes... Or, so the first one I ran was on character, because at the time people were like, "Oh, that's what you're good at. So run one on character". I was like, "ok". So I ran one on character, and I just brought a lot of the stuff that I remember doing as like a kid around like how you can get into character and different ways you can get into character and that was all like walking around the space, with different levels of tension and walking around the space with different levels of purpose and walking around the spaces, different animals and different amounts of animals and stuff like that. And so I ran a thing that was that where like, the drop in, like the jam, was skills oriented, I guess rather than like, practice oriented.

Richard Minkley 27:18

Yeah.

Liam Webber 27:19

And I definitely went too far the other way and like planned way too many exercises. And there was no, there was no way near enough time. But I think, that... And I didn't just run one, right. Like, I ran one and then a couple months later, I ran another, a couple months later, I ran another. And they were always this, they always had this skills kind of focus and it became this thing of like, well, a lot of people would turn up to the skills focused things because you weren't, they weren't the opportunities for courses that there are now where it's like, you know, if you join the community, you've probably got a level one course within the next two months. You know, it was like, when I joined it was a year before I did the level one class and then 18 months after that before there was another level two class to take, right? So I think people appreciated the skills focus on it. And...

Richard Minkley 28:16

What was it about the skills focus that people appreciated?

Liam Webber 28:18

Well, it was just, you know, like, a lot of the time, you'd be turning up and doing scenes. And sometimes the scenes would work, and sometimes the scenes wouldn't work, and then you'd sit down. Yeah, and sometimes we do some drills like, you know, 'yes, and' drills and stuff like that. But if we were doing drills, that would always be the same drills. And if we were doing like, you know, if you were getting notes, it would be the same notes, right? You didn't say yes to that idea. You didn't say yes to that idea.

Richard Minkley 28:48

You just said that with a face. What does that mean?

Liam Webber 28:57

You know, you gotta appreciate where the community was and the people within the community at the time, and where the art form was at the time, right? You know, like, improv changed a lot in the last five years. 'Me too' has done a lot for improv. Not necessarily directly, but like, a lot of this stuff, like, around like toxic 'yes, and'ing, all of that crap, which is like, which I think was present here as well, right. You know, you got to say yes to the other person's idea, regardless of what it is, like, I was put in like, uncomfortable positions on stage by a variety of like people, right, like, you know. Occasionally, purposefully, and like, you know that, yeah. And...

Richard Minkley 29:45

So, I'm not gonna ask you to give, I mean, you can if you want to, but I'm not gonna ask you for those details. What is the change then? So there's there's three parts of this. There's me too, which is a broader thing, which I don't need you to explain. But there's that sense of the culture before that moment. And after that moment.

Liam Webber 30:06

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 30:07

I'm trying to understand the changes.

Liam Webber 30:08

I think it's, I think it's attached to that movement. I think it's a repercussion of that movement. The idea that, so like, the base philosophy of improv, what what, you know, at least what here was was taught, and what is taught, widely, is this idea of 'yes, and', the idea of accept and build. That what you bring to the stage, I'm going to accept as the truth and build on that.

Richard Minkley 30:32

And that is built on the idea of literally saying the phrase, yes, in a scene.

Liam Webber 30:37

Well. So I would argue the reverse of what you just said. So the core principle is that I accept the truth that you bring to the stage...

Richard Minkley 30:47

Okay.

Liam Webber 30:48

... and build on that. So if you come in and you're like, "I just got a phone call from my mum", I'm not going to be like, "that's not a phone in your hand. That's a banana". Right. I'm going to accept the truth that it's a phone call from your mum. And a very literal reading of that process is that is the, is 'yes, and', right, is that. You come in, say something, I'll say "yes" to that, say "and", and add to it. And there are obvious problematic things that can arise from the idea that like, "whatever you say, I have to say yes" to if you come in and you're like, "I'm your boyfriend and I'm about to kiss you". And then I then, I feel pressured to be like, "yes, you are my boyfriend. And you're about to kiss me. And", right, like, you know. Like, that's problematic and it puts people, it can put people in awkward positions. And I think that blindly saying 'yes, and' is a really like problematic thing, and I it puts you in areas where maybe you wind up uncomfortable. So when when I when I make a face because I'm like people will like you didn't say yes to my idea. I think that's because like, I think as leaders in the community that people

who are giving that note should have been more aware of like, maybe that the real human being on stage's personal comfort is more important than any bullshit made up comedy scene that we're trying to make, and that the priorities should have been in the right place. That said, like, that's not a criticism of like, Missimp alone. That's a criticism of like, improv as an art form and something that was prevalent and like you can talk to pretty much any who's been going like, over the, like, since before, I think. And lots going like since after it, but like I think it will be, I think there has been a shift in the way that we talk about acceptance. And, 'yes, and' as like a more philosophical approach, right? You take it, the spirit of it is that me and you are pirates together leaping into the unknown. I'm going to accept what you say you're going to accept what I say. But we're pirates together who don't want to put the other pirate in a position of like, right, like, it's the spirit of it. That's really important. And I think I think there has been a shift but like, you can talk to anyone and people will have stories of being like, "Yeah, no, I", you know, I do and like, you know, I'm a, I'm a white dude. And I was put in positions where I was uncomfortable on stage right like,

Richard Minkley 33:48

There is, I feel like there is a word that would be suitable for this description of things, which is 'pimping'. Because, I around this time I joined the scene, and I don't remember whether it was taught that way, but that idea of pimping as a tool in a scene as a thing you can do with or to another player. Would you say that the thing you described where like you're using 'yes, and' to make people do stuff could be described as pimping or is pimping something else? Because I'm aware. I mean, pimping as a word clearly has.

Liam Webber 34:24

Yeah problematic, you're right.

Richard Minkley 34:25

Yeah, prostitutes usually, Prostitution around it.

Liam Webber 34:26

So, sex work.

Richard Minkley 34:29

Nope, no fair point.

Liam Webber 34:30

Yeah. Yeah, just like if you're if you're like, recording it, you probably want to. Yeah, like.

Richard Minkley 34:35

Well, yeah. Yeah, no, it's a good point. It's a good point.

Liam Webber 34:40

Yeah. But yes. Yeah, the, pimping in itself, like, the very word is problematic, right. Like, the act of it, I think is... It can be used to describe a wide variety of like situations. Right. Like, I think where was, what like, we traditionally termed as pimping was like, if you if you came in and said like, "ah", like, "there are 10 reasons why I don't like what you just said", right? I would, my response to that would be like to turn around and be like, "what are all 10? list them.", right? And that's kind of like, that, I think is the like. That's, I think, what what people were aiming for when when they talked about pimping. And it was this idea of mischievous, like, there's a certain degree of like mischief and playing with the other

person. And I think that's still like, a valid thing within improv. Like, I think like, the mischievous element of like, if I'm friends with you and me and you were really good mates, and we're on stage together, having a good time, and you say something that makes me go like, "I want to see you do that".

Richard Minkley 35:51

Yeah.

Liam Webber 35:52

Right. That's fine. But again, like I think it came with like this baggage of like, you could be pimped into doing anything on the stage. And if you didn't do it you'd not be yes-and'ing it, so you'd be being a bad improviser. And I think one of the reasons why people said like, I was funny but not a good improviser was because sometimes I would be one of these people who had the like, sense of self about me to be like, "Fuck you, no. I'm not doing that". And even though I was like that, even though I was brash and arrogant, and even though I was like, fucking... I, you know, when I first started I was like, "I want to be funny". Right? Which is not the attitude to have as an improviser. "I want to be funny", fuck that guy. But I was that guy. And even that guy, even that brash, arrogant, fuck everything else to be funny myself guy was put in situations that he felt uncomfortable. So, you know, there are problematic ideas in it, and like the way we teach, 'yes, and' now within Missimp is very much, is very changed. I think, like I've not taught a level one class for a little while, but like, it should be like, right, the idea that like we're going to say yes to this truth but we overtly state that, any point, the priority is your personal comfort that this should be a thing that is fun that you're enjoying doing. And like the person's personal boundaries are more important than any scene we do, right? I would always rather you just like fucking walk out a scene and feel uncomfortable.

Richard Minkley 37:43

So, we're coming to the end of the first sort of half of the interview, which we're doing. The thing I want to round up on is, we've just spent a big chunk of time discussing the difference there between which is, which is honestly fascinating and really, really, really interesting.

Liam Webber 37:57

But it's not what the podcasts about...

Richard Minkley 37:59

But, I want a date. No, no. The thing I'm interesting in though is like, we just talked about that what was the material effect of the actual improv that was happening? Like what is the difference of an improv scene before those changes had come into effect? And after? Or is there a noticeable difference between either seen or the scene before as a whole

Liam Webber 38:23

I think people are more considerate. I think you get far fewer scenes where people are like, particularly like the strangers or people who don't know each other, right? You get far fewer scenes like relationships. Like, touchy feely relationships. You got far fewer scenes that are like, boss and co worker, sexual innuendo scenes, right, like. I think it's just people are aware of like, I think people are just more aware now of like, what a problematic thing looks like. And like, you know, I'm sure things still slip through and stuff like, you know, huge decline in like accent work, interestingly, because like people are suddenly beginning to realise that like, perhaps it's not cool to do an archetypal stereotype, typical acts and you know, like.

Richard Minkley 39:24

Did you find then when you first started, some of the games that were talked about was like,

Liam Webber 39:31

Around the world in...

Richard Minkley 39:31

Around the world.

Liam Webber 39:32

... really bad accidents. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 39:33

Yeah. The accent game where you do a scene, you'd ring a bell and then you'd say "okay, now do it in French".

Liam Webber 39:39

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 39:39

And everyone holds cigarettes and stuff like that.

Liam Webber 39:41

Yeah, exactly. And stuff like that has been, at least in Missimp syllabus, has been replaced by genre work. Rather than like that that was the easy change that we made was like, suddenly, rather than like, teaching around the world and bad accents, we do genre rollercoaster which is essentially the same structure, right? You're doing a scene, someone rings a bell, the scene changes in terms of its style, but the information and like the what the scenes about retains, is still the same and you wind up with doing like film noir stuff. And just fewer people are doing accents, which is, which is good, on the whole, I think like, you know.

Richard Minkley 40:25

Okay, I'm going to stop the recording there for a break. Is there anything you want to add? We're going to come back and talk about more stuff. But is there anything you want to add on what we've just been over?

Liam Webber 40:36

I mean, I can't think what we've actually talked about to be honest.

Richard Minkley 40:38

Yeah, I get this problem all the time. If theres... you happy?

Liam Webber 40:42

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 40:42

Right. I'm gonna stop recording.

c) Part 3 of 3

7th March 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

improv, people, fucking, Dummy, night, Nottingham, running, jams, stage, bit, colleen, smash, started, feel, perform, workshop, happened, life, io, connect

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Liam Webber

Richard Minkley 00:00

Hit record. There we go.

Liam Webber 00:01

Rock n roll.

Richard Minkley 00:01

It is 11:22 Saturday, 7th March 2010 (its 2020). Richard Minkley interviewing Liam Webber for the Missimp oral history project.

Liam Webber 00:03

Sup bitches. *pew pew pew* *air horn noises*.

Richard Minkley 00:04

We have a theme song now. No. So, to kind of remember where we were previously, we kind of got to a point where you'd started taking jams.

Liam Webber 00:08

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 00:08

2017/2018

Liam Webber 00:08

Ish, yeah.

Richard Minkley 00:09

Ish. When did things, so, I'm trying... We're getting to a point where we're connecting where we are now with where we were then.

Liam Webber 00:32

Maybe its earlier than that, you know?

Richard Minkley 00:34

What was the next part of the story were you, because I'm a that you start stepping up and running things.

Liam Webber 00:37

Mmmm.

Richard Minkley 00:37

And you've already begun that process with how you're stepping up and running jams.

Liam Webber 00:39

I think I might have got the years wrong. I'm not...

Richard Minkley 00:41

Are you a year earlier than you think? Or year later, sorry?

Liam Webber 01:16

Maybe a year later. I'm just trying to think. So did I, so i'll have started coming to Missimp-y stuff in...

Richard Minkley 01:26

According to this, it's 7th September 2014.

Liam Webber 01:29

That's when I, that sounds. No, I reckon it's 2013. Fuck, I bet it's 2013. I bet everythings a year earlier.

Richard Minkley 01:40

Well, I think we can figure out the date a little bit afterwards. The sequence I'm interested in is; we're in the cross. You started taking jams. What happens next in that progression towards where we all now?

Liam Webber 01:58

Yeah, I think I think not to long after that we rebranded the jams to drop ins because they were drop in workshops, right, rather than. And like, we thought that people didn't know what jam meant. Like random members of the public would be like, "improv jam. The fucks that?".

Richard Minkley 02:17

I believe the promotional material, I don't think it was that point, but there was also, it would, had a picture of a jam jar, which maybe didn't help the explanation.

Liam Webber 02:24

Potentially.

Richard Minkley 02:25

So, what was a drop in defined as or...?

Liam Webber 02:29

Two hours you do some... What it became was like you'd do some, I mean, it's it's basically the format that it's in now, right? Like.

Richard Minkley 02:38

Yeah.

Liam Webber 02:39

Two hours, you'd do a bunch of warm ups, focus in on some kind of skill activity, and then at the end probably have like, open scenes at the end, where you can try and practice the thing you've been doing, but without necessarily the confines of the exercises.

Richard Minkley 02:57

Where did that idea come from?

Liam Webber 03:04

I don't really know. I guess, like, that was kind of how I always structured them a bit. But I would never, I would always at the beginning, I would always, I would always plan far too many exercises, so we'd never get to the free play bit. But that was always the like, ark of the classes that, the dropping classes that I teach. I guess it kind of mirrored the classes that I'd taken with non Missimp teachers. So by that point, I'd have worked with Lydia Hensler from UCB and Dummy for IO. Dummy being the main one, who I was like, "This is, that's how you improvise. I get it now".

Richard Minkley 03:48

So is this... So before then, you'd...

Liam Webber 03:56

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 03:58

I'm sorry, I'm trying to slot, you just Refer to UCB, and Dummy, and Lydia, Lydia somebody's.

Liam Webber 04:03

Lydia Hensler

Richard Minkley 04:04

Lydia Hensler. We're they things you went to outside Missimp? We're they things you did before Missimp?

Liam Webber 04:09

They were things that Lloydie organised. So they lady brought them to Nottingham. Both times. In both cases.

Richard Minkley 04:17

Do you remember what you learn?

Liam Webber 04:20

Lydia was all about like, I mean, Lydia was UCB class, you know. There was a fair amount on game. And like, so the first time Lydia taught two classes, I think. In fact, I think both times Lydia taught two

classes. So Lydia has been to Nottingham twice. But like, the main one for me was Dummy when Jason and Colleen from IO West came over. Their workshop changed the way that I improvise completely and set me on the course I am still on, I think. I think like, watching their show and doing their workshop was probably the most, the biggest impact on me as performer.

Richard Minkley 05:00

So did you do them in that order? Did you watch that show and then do their workshop?

Liam Webber 05:04

Yeah. So we went...

Richard Minkley 05:05

Do you remember the show?

Liam Webber 05:06

Yes.

Richard Minkley 05:06

Tell, what was the show?

Liam Webber 05:09

So the show is like, widely, like, most people have probably heard me tell this story because it's the moment that I fell in love with improv really was their show, was watching their show.

Richard Minkley 05:22

I'm sorry, I'm not gonna let you go without describing the moment you fell in love with improv.

Liam Webber 05:25

So they were in Birmingham. So, they we're in Birmingham. They've been running a class for John Trevor in Birmingham. And they were coming up to nothing and the next day, and Lloydie was driving down to watch their show and pick them up and bring them back and asked if I wanted to come with him. And I was like, "yeah, sure, why not? Why the fuck not?". And so I went down, just like, "eh, it's gonna be a fun improv show". And they did an hour off of a single suggestion. Which you know I'd seen that before but like it was just a two person show, they played multiple characters. It was slower than most things I'd seen. It was more heartfelt. They were playing real people on stage. It wasn't, it didn't look like they were working hard. It didn't look like they were going to stop characters. It didn't look like they were like, it just looked effortless. It looked, you know, it was a step above, it was like 10 steps above anything I'd ever seen. And you know Dummy were, and are, one of the best improv teams in the world, right. Like, you know, they won the best team title in Chicago, two years running. Best teachers in Chicago, two years running, or like each of them had one at once because that was a duo Colleen Doyle and Jason Shotts. They were just fantastic. They were amazing. I worked with them once since and loved it as well. And you know, like, if it weren't for that experience, I don't think I'd have wound up doing improv in the way that I do. And like loving improv in the way that I love it and like committing to it and the way that I have. Like, just like their show was was the turning point.

Richard Minkley 07:08

Do you remember what you learnt at their workshop?

Liam Webber 07:19

Everything.

Richard Minkley 07:21

Everything. Well.

Liam Webber 07:22

Everything like.

Richard Minkley 07:24

I don't want to ask you too big of a question, but define everything.

Liam Webber 07:27

So, all improv is is, I listen to what you're saying and then I respond to the thing you've just said. That's all it is.

Richard Minkley 07:40

And that's what you got from that workshop?

Liam Webber 07:42

Thats what I got. I got told that I was allowed to say no. I got told that me disliking something as strong an offer as me liking something. I got told I'm allowed to bring elements of my own person to improv, that I'm allowed to, that I, myself, Liam, as a person is interesting enough to just bring stuff that's true to the stage and the audience will connect with that. I don't need to work hard. I don't need to create characters. I got told that like, the audience don't want to see perfect people, they want to see flawed people. You know, you could look at any one of my shows, and I could point at 1001 things that I'm doing, which are based in the stuff that I did in that workshop. Right, it was just like, you know... It was like a light was turned on. It was like, the world was just like suddenly... So what you've been doing, you know, it's like you've been painting all your life with acrylics, and someone's just gone like, "heres oils, and heres pencils, and heres watercolours and heres paper mache", you know, like, you've been doing this small section of this thing, and they've just like gone, "nope". There's way more to this than you ever thought. And, it's way easier than you're letting it be. Yeah, like, just like, fantastic. And, you know, I know people who've worked with them and hated it. Though for me, like, but for me like that was it and it still is it, right? Like, you know, I'm lucky enough to have now since seen acts like TJ and Dave, who are a team who perform in that style and who in that workshop, you know, Jason and Colleen were talking about as being the gold standard for improv. And I would have to agree with that.

Richard Minkley 09:42

So,

Liam Webber 09:42

But yeah, and I've worked with people who've worked with, you know, like, talk to like, it's just so like, indicative, right? Like, that teachers I've worked with, who I've really connected with, so like Stacy Smith, who was my level two teacher IO who's easily, hands down, one of the best improv teachers I've ever had. You know, I think she's responsible for me feeling as free as I do on stage. Thats, a lot of that is down to her. Colleen was her level two teacher and Jason was her level four teacher, right? Like, you know, there's like this lineage of like the people who I connect with connected with them. And I think there's this improv like, it's a personal experience, right? Like, when you get onstage all

you really have is your own brain and how you connect with this weird transient art form. Like, all you really have is yourself and like, what I'm, my response is and stuff like that. How I connect with it, it's all so deeply linked into your voice as a performer and your voice as a human being. And you find teachers who connect with that and resonate with that and whose journey to get to where they are is similar to the journey that, is a similar journey to the one that you're on. And, all of the teachers who I've connected with have a similar background in it and a similar, like, journey and like have, seemed to have, the same like points on the way. You know like Stacey and then but then there's also like Jorin Garguilo. Again like fucking IO like. And when I went to IO it was, it was like being like, "Oh no", you know. While I think the work IO isn't necessarily what... Mmmm... IO is very... IOs a very interesting place because it's sold on the back of a dead man, who died 20 years ago. Right? Like, it's sold on Dell Close's legacy. So they kind of have to, they need to be, part of their like whole thing needs to be around the fact that like, what he taught and where he brought the art form was as good as it gets. You know, like the Harald is still like held up on this, and it's fantastic. Don't get me wrong, like, you what you're good Harold and it's like magic on stage. But like I think the art form has evolved and actually a lot of the work that came out of IO, after Del Close, like TJ and Dave like Dummy, you know. It's not necessarily reflected in the syllabus they teach and stuff like that. But you meet people there. I met people there and I was like, "Oh, yeah, this is...", in like a weird way like that. I've not felt anywhere. Not even in like Nottingham where i've lived like the vast majority of my life. There was a real sense of like, when I talked to people about the art form. Like, "Aw, no, I'm home here", you know. And I think that started with that class with Jason and Colleen probably.

Richard Minkley 12:48

Sounds like a very transcendent experience for yourself. Like, you became, you know, it took you out of the way you...

Liam Webber 12:55

I think so. Yeah.

Richard Minkley 12:57

Then you came back to Missimp, afterwards, like, how...

Liam Webber 13:00

What, after working with Jason and Colleen?

Richard Minkley 13:02

Well yeah I'm interested in...

Liam Webber 13:04

Jason and Colleen's workshop happened in this room.

Richard Minkley 13:06

So this is the thing I'm interested in. Like, how did that experience affect your experience of Missimp going forwards?

Liam Webber 13:19

I saw then what improv can be. Right? I saw, like, I saw it. I felt it. I felt in that class like, "this is what it could be". And then obviously they left. They left at the end the workshop.

Richard Minkley 13:37

Oh, you sound so heartbroken.

Liam Webber 13:38

We all shook hands. Well, I think we went for like fish and chips and hung out in the trip to Jerusalem for a bit. Yeah, I mean, what I wouldn't give to have a teacher like. I mean, that's what I thought like, "what I wouldn't give to have those people here". And I wanted I didn't want to be that. Like the it's not like a personal thing of like, "I want to be that for Nottingham". But it's like, I want Nottingham to have that. And so it became like, how can I, how can I make that happen here? And part of that was you know, I started doing the two-prov with Lloydie, who stylistically, like, you can trace the, like, style of what we're doing, like, back to that kind of two-prov show with like Dummy and, you know. As a fucking, first show we did we ripped off their even, we ripped off their fucking get. You know, it was like, we just, I just wanted to be Dummy.

Richard Minkley 13:51

What was the name, What's the name of your two-prov?

Liam Webber 14:36

The clones.

Richard Minkley 14:37

The clones?

Liam Webber 14:39

Exactly. Which I think is somewhat self aware. But actually, it came from somewhere. It came from a fucking stupid joke. But...

Richard Minkley 14:51

Well, what was the stupid joke?

Liam Webber 14:52

I kept, so, I got us, so. At the Fringe, I ran like a night called, 'clusterfuck: a show' for like four years at Clusterfuck. I ran it with a couple people. And it was like a mix bill, we put on improv, stand up, variety night, sketch, music, whatever. Like, it was just, like, every night that'd be three or four different acts. And it was just a really fun like mashup night and I was like I can get us a show at this night to Lloydie. Lloydie was up at the Fringe like three nights.

Richard Minkley 15:19

So this is at the Fringe?

Liam Webber 15:20

Yeah, the Fringe. I was like, this would be the Fringe after the Dummy workshop. Right. So there's a workshop would have been in February of that year.

Richard Minkley 15:28

So, you were already running a night at the Fringe, a couple of years running?

Liam Webber 15:32

Yeah, this would be like, third or fourth year running that I'd been running this Clusterfuck at the front.

Richard Minkley 15:39

Okay.

Liam Webber 15:41

You know, first year I went to the Fringe we ran clusterfuck. Right. We ran it in two separate venues. Oh, it was a good year. And in fact, actually, it was the year, so the year that we did that. So like that year I was also running the titter truck, which was a van we parked on Grassmarket and put 10 seats in the back of and turned it into like a miniature theatre. And we ran shows out the back of that.

Richard Minkley 16:07

Okay.

Liam Webber 16:07

We ran 10 minutes shows every, 10 minutes from three to 8pm. Every day. for a month.

Richard Minkley 16:15

For a month?

Liam Webber 16:16

Yeah, before that. So we would go, we would do, Joe Hart had his hour, which we were writing and teaching and producing and directing. This is me, Joe and Jed, we were the three. We were like a...

Richard Minkley 16:30

Joe Hart and?

Liam Webber 16:31

Joe Hart and Jed Jasper is his stage name.

Richard Minkley 16:34

Right.

Liam Webber 16:35

Jed doesn't perform anymore. Joe still does stand up and like do stuff with Red Bull. Like twitch stuff. I don't I don't really understand it. But I keep telling him he needs to get me on as a writer because I'm funnier than he is. That's not true. He's hilarious. But yeah, so the three of us, we would go and do the Fringe together. And we were, we were a team. And we did, that year we were doing... That year, I was doing, so at 1pm, I would do, yeah, at 1pm I'd do Joe Hart's solo show till 2pm. I then come out have a break and 3:30 the maydays had their hour show and I was teaching that, so I was on lights for that.

Richard Minkley 17:19

Was this while Lloydie was with the Maydays?

Liam Webber 17:22

Yeah, it was. Yes. Yeah. So, but Lloydie he only came up for a long weekend. I was there the whole time doing the tech. And then I'd go from there to the truck that we'd parked on Grassmarket and I'd

have to get there as quickly as I possibly could afterwards to start flaring and doing work on that until 8pm. And then at 8pm we'd have to pack the truck up, drive the truck back to where we parked it at nighttime, and then come back to the city centre. So that we could do Clusterfuck at 845 till 945. So that was my Fringe that year. Crazy. Good fun. And maybe I'm conflating two Fringes. I don't know. Anyway, but that was my year that year.

Richard Minkley 18:10

I'm stubbornly waiting for the clones gag.

Liam Webber 18:14

Of course, yeah. I forgot what we were talking about. Yeah, so I was like, "Lloydie, I can get as a show, but you need to tell me, but I need a name to put down. Tell me a name to put down". And he just kept fucking texting me Star Wars film titles. So our first ever show we would just Attack of the Clones. And then we shortened it to The Clones for the second show.

Richard Minkley 18:38

I'm constantly and

Liam Webber 18:40

Now I feel like it's self aware because everything we do is copying everyone else.

Richard Minkley 18:46

It just it seems like all of the teams are a pun on a film, eventually.

Liam Webber 18:50

You say, eventually.

Richard Minkley 18:53

Anyway, that's just something that keeps coming up. Anyway. So we're in that phase, you've done, it might be 2017, might be 2018.

Liam Webber 19:04

Yeah, the past.

Richard Minkley 19:04

You've done. It's the past, you've done the Dummy workshop.

Liam Webber 19:09

If you talk to Lloydie, you'll be able to get an idea for when the Dummy workshop happened.

Richard Minkley 19:12

I'm sure I've got it on the website somewhere. But.

Liam Webber 19:15

yeah, and that would be the year that i've started teaching...

Richard Minkley 19:18

You've had this big event. You've seen this big...

Liam Webber 19:22

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 19:23

... vision of what improv can be. And then you bring it back to Nottingham. And that's where clones came from.

Liam Webber 19:30

Yeah, I mean, it happened, this thing happened in Nottingham, but, yeah. Yeah. Okay, sure.

Richard Minkley 19:35

So, we are now in a space where we've gone from having Gorilla Burger like jams and Gorilla Burger in The Corner.

Liam Webber 19:47

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 19:48

To drop ins and Gorilla Burger at the Malt Cross, where we are now. And it's about 2017/2018. What happens next in the chronology of it all, really? Because it feels, again, it feels like the amount of time that we've got left between where we're talking about where we are now is shrinking. And the number of things that have changed seems to keep going up and up.

Liam Webber 20:18

Yeah, so I would say 2017, a friend of mine puts me in contact with a guy at the angel, who's just taken over in his refurbished place, and he's like, I want to bring, I want to have some comedy here. Friend of mine asks me because I run clusterfuck in London. At this point, we're running clusterfuck in London as a monthly show, and at the Fringe every August for the whole Fringe. And it's an it's a night that's known for bringing very good acts. You know, we've had like Edinburgh award winners perform at this point. And so a friend of mine puts me in contact with Steve that the Angel, and he's like, "do you want to run a comedy night here?". And I was like, "not really". It sounds like a lot of work. But I take it to Missimp, and like, "I've got this opportunity for a show, in a space. What do you think?" and they're all like, "No. Jesus Christ, no. Why would we want to be doing shows?"

Richard Minkley 21:31

Was that the actual response or was it...?

Liam Webber 21:35

I'm being a bit hyperbolic, but like, the general response was like, "Mmm, probably not". But I'm like, "but I think it would be a good idea to get improv, like have an opportunity for like people in the community to perform". Because right like at the moment, you know, there are gorilla burgers happening. Maybe my, maybe my timelines are wrong because I'm pretty sure Rhymes performed at Gorilla Burger in The Corner, which it doesn't make any sense to me. Anyway,

Richard Minkley 22:11

To be honest, we're not going to be using this as a 'set in stone' chronology. We're getting a sense of what was out.

Liam Webber 22:18

Yeah, okay. Yeah. I'm not. My brain isn't organised in terms of time.

Richard Minkley 22:22

This is the nature of oral history, don't worry.

Liam Webber 22:24

Yeah. So, you know, Rhymes are getting a couple of performance opportunities. We're starting to like, but don't get me wrong, we're rehearsing every week and we're doing like two shows.

Richard Minkley 22:33

Okay

Liam Webber 22:34

We do two shows in our first year, or something like that. And then we get this opportunity. Lloydie finds this opportunity at the Playhouse. You know, he get Martin Berry and that happened, but it's like, how are we gonna, you know, and they do this Star Wars Show, and Rhymes open for them. I reckon that would probably be about the same time, or maybe that was like June 20... I'd say probably like June 2017, maybe maybe even earlier than that. No it won't be earlier than that. I don't know. Anyway, the point is...

Richard Minkley 23:11

So, Lloydie gets a playhouse gig through Martin Berry to do, Star Wars.

Liam Webber 23:16

Yeah, or it's just for Missimp to have a show there, right. Like, and we do Star Wars because it's sellable. And Rhymes open for them. That's happening. I'm vaguely aware of it. But like, I know Lloydie has probably been talking my ear off about how he's trying to get us another Playhouse at this point. And I'm just like, "I think I've got this opportunity for us to do a show". And it turns out, it's like March 2017. I think. Maybe even though. It's definitely March. Definitely March.

Richard Minkley 23:49

Why is it definitely March?

Liam Webber 23:51

It just is, it just is.

Richard Minkley 23:53

Fair enough.

Liam Webber 23:53

I just know it was in March. And they're like, "mmuh", and I'm like, "Just give us a show. Give us, we'll do one, and we'll see how it goes".

Richard Minkley 24:04

So this is to the angel.

Liam Webber 24:05

No. Well, that was what the angel said to me. They were like, "come and do a show. You want to do a comedy show with us". And I was like, I remember because I was like, "Oh, yeah, sure, I'll do that" And then like, six months passed while they refurbished the space and they didn't think about it at all. And then they could go back to me in like, January, and were like, "You're still doing the show in March, right?" And I was like, "Oh, fuck, yeah." So I go to Missimp, and I'm like, "I got this opportunity for space. Do we want to try out a show?" And they were tentative and then eventually, they were like, "yeah, we'll try it out". And then we try out what... And Nicks like, "We could call it Smash Night." so I'm like, "Yeah, sure." And like that night Nicks come up with the graphics that we then use for the rest of the time. And yeah, so we do that. That's fine. That's great. Yeah, works well. You know Smash Night works well. Rhymes perform. Social Club perform. Have a different team perform as well. Can't remember.

Richard Minkley 25:03

And, so this is March 2017, ish, was the first Smash Night.

Liam Webber 25:08

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 25:09

So just

Liam Webber 25:10

Mmm. I think so.

Richard Minkley 25:11

Might have been 2018

Liam Webber 25:12

Might of been.

Richard Minkley 25:13

Or 2016. We'll see. It'll be on a... It'll be somewhere. There'll be a facebook ad or something.

Liam Webber 25:16

There'll be something somewhere. Yeah. So like in the past. One March. And the angel, and like, we sell really well. Like, we get like a good number of people and the angel are like, "Oh, yeah, we want to turn this into a monthly night. So I go back to Missimp and I'm like, "Oh, we could, we could have a monthly night here". And they're like, "No. Jesus Christ, no, why we want to do that?" And I was like, "it's fine I'll run it. I'll run it and I'll be in charge of it. I'll deal with everything to do with it. We just need like, I don't want to run another Facebook page. We'll just do it". I win them over and, you know, Smash Night becomes what it was. I think like, that was like the thing of like, suddenly we had in the space, we'd gone from like, being In The Corner, when I first started to... Now we were doing stuff in the Malt Cross, we had Rhymes doing stuff, Vox Pops was starting around that time. You had...

Richard Minkley 25:47

Smash Night.

Liam Webber 26:19

Smash Night starting up. Three shows a year at the Playhouse and that was you know, and it felt like a real like steep ramp into into where we were.

Richard Minkley 26:31

so, so much to go into there. What...

Liam Webber 26:36

We got time.

Richard Minkley 26:37

Yeah, what is Smash Night like?

Liam Webber 26:41

So it started as an experimental night that was the idea. The idea was that it would be a, it would be the night where if people wanted to be like, people wanted to put on a show they could be like, "Oh yeah, I'll come and like". And so like there was a point where like, just like, early on like a bunch of random like shit just kind of happened there, right. Like...

Richard Minkley 27:00

What random shit, please?

Liam Webber 27:03

Well there was. what were they called? 'Land of giant'? no. no, 'land of giants' are different team. Giants dream house or something stupid like that. It was fucking Lee and John Hardy and Sam Lane? A couple other people doing this show that was basically just like fucking freeze tag for 20 minutes. And like, and we started to do that but then I also just started to ask like people from like further afield, to come over and do shows. You know, we had like 'Same Faces' came over, guys came from Birmingham, you know guys from Sheffield came down, 'Sturike' came down, 'Monkey Heads' from like fucking Leeds or wherever they're based. And we just started to, we just started to like. And Smash Nights, slowly, well, actually relatively quickly, evolved into this night that became like, really quite prescriptive in terms of like, you'd have one local team, one guest team from around the UK and then this montage team, the Social Club, which was just like. The idea was that it would be a space for newer players to potentially get on stage and do stuff. And Nick Tyler wasn't performing at all, really. So it was it was a space where Nick could actually get on stage and do improv. And so Nick was in charge of the social club, and I did the programming of everything else. And that was kind of, and like, I would run the night. Initially, actually, it was it was me and Minder, who ran it. At that point, Minder was doing a bunch of stuff with Missimp. And you know, she was absolutely instrumental in terms of like, turning around like, the way they marketed shows. Particularly with Smash Night, you know, she she gave us the the foundation of like how we market that. She taught me so much about like marketing and everything like. And like all those things which I didn't really have a tonne of ideas about but you know, she was. She brought a lot to that. And like how you market in a way that doesn't just. She was basically like if you've got people who aren't the dominant culture in your community, you probably want to be putting those on stage. You probably want to be putting them in the marketing if you want to widen your appeal to more than just straight white dudes. I was like, "hah, that makes so much sense". And you know, you get like. There are problematic issues that arise from from from these things, but like, I would always rather be problematic in the attempt for progress and change and might look back on stuff and be like, "I could have done that, but my heart was in the place of like, we

want to, like, ensure that..." And so it was like stuff like, you know ensuring that this Smash Night Social Club was gender balanced. Ensuring that, if, we're possible the teams coming to the show we're gender balanced. And Smash Night at that time was like really the part where, the star of that. That was the first time we're really we like considered that stuff I think. And it was like a big part of what we did, was like around, you know, gender balance was really like key and that was like a real aim. Was like can we get this community more gender balance. Which I think did and has happened now. I think Missimp, in terms of if you look like around the UK at least like, Missimp has a good number of like, you know, it's gender balance is better than most I do believe. But you know, it's One of these things as well that you can't stop looking at and can't stop working on. But yeah. And that was the first time we really like thought about that stuff and look to that stuff which is interesting.

Richard Minkley 31:08

What around Smash Night?

Liam Webber 31:10

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 31:11

Okay.

Liam Webber 31:11

Yeah Smash Night was where that, and because that was my focus and I was like, "okay yeah. let's make some..." I remember reading something at the time by Bec Hill who's like an Australian comedian who I knew through Clusterfuck and stuff like that. She's fantastic. But she posted a thing that was like, "in the future we have to hope that all", and she was talking about stand up but like, she was like, "you have to hope that in the future like all standard lineups you'll just be like, doing it based on like what you want this night to feel like and who, what acts are going to go with what acts and doing it on merit who's really good and who's not really good. And it will wind up being roughly 50/50 all the time. Because in the future we'll be in a place where that happens". At the moment, there are so many more male comedians than female comedians that we just have to be proactive about that. You just have to be shameless, and be like no, we are actively making sure that there are more women, like of our community. A larger number of women are represented on stage than men and stuff like that. And that really like, it was like, it's your duty as like promoters to to do your bit now and be proactive now and force this issue now, so that the women in the audience who are watching this show, watch the show and are like, "ah, there's someone like me on stage, I could do this", right. That's the message you're sending.

Richard Minkley 32:42

Is this the point as well where you've been running jams? I'm interested because we've gone from you as this 19 year old who is you know...

Liam Webber 32:54

A fucking nightmare.

Richard Minkley 32:55

fucking nightmare then.

Liam Webber 32:56

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 32:58

You're talking about responsible, both, I mean, especially in terms of gender, but you also mentioned race, and you're also taking on responsibility for a gig. When did you feel like you were taking responsibility for a community?

Liam Webber 33:16

It's a good question.

Richard Minkley 33:17

Thank you.

Liam Webber 33:18

Um, that definitely came later.

Richard Minkley 33:24

Did it feel, no do carry on.

Liam Webber 33:26

So, like, my trajectory within Missimp was, I started out, and I was like, boisterous fucking idiot teenager. And I still am to some degree. But like, you know, that's where I started. And I was just kind of going along, and this was the place where I like fucked around. I had fun. I had no real interest in being better "improv", beyond like, I like being good at stuff, right. But like, my quota for like, "Am I doing this well?" was audience laughter which isn't necessarily the best. You know, talk to people. Ask people about like, what it was like to improvise with me when I first started, they'll be like, "it was fucking horrendous. Its a horrible experience". And I was just kind of going along and then I saw Dummy. And it was like, there was the aspiration there. And at a similar time Rhymes started. And so I was doing improv now two times a week. And I was doing and you know, and actually, like, you got to think like, when I first started at The Corner, I was doing it, you know, while it was in like a trashy place. I was doing it with like, people like Lloydie, Nick, Marilyn, Martin, Phil, Jamie, Jeannette, these are people who've been doing it way longer than I had, who were pretty good performers. And you learn a lot by performing with people. You learn a lot by doing with people and so I think a combination of that, like did help help me understand how to improvise a bit better but like it was Dummy that really like changed that. And then it was like, well, I mean, I have this opportunity for Smash Night. I'll do that and when I started to run Smash Night that's when I started to be, become involved in like the discussions of how Missimp ran, because I was suddenly running like something that was a third of its output, right. This group was doing like jams, drop ins. We did like one course a year maybe. And me and Lloydie kind of came in at that point as well. And Minder came with me really. Because me and Minder kind of came as a team because we were the team working on Smash Night. And Lloydie was there at the Playhouse and that team kind of expanded a bit from just being Nick and Parky and Marilyn, to now there was five or six of us. And that's when I started to be like more involved in terms of the decision making stuff. I didn't think in terms of the community I really, a tonne beyond the fact that I was like, "Smash Nights and opportunity for them. I want to provide an opportunity for the people who are coming on a Thursday and want to perform in front of an audience. I want to provide that opportunity". I didn't think about it in terms of like, "I have a duty of care to these people". You know, I think I think that came a bit later

[-]

Richard Minkley 39:59

What was the change after that? What were the things that that kind of situation brought about that you then, because you've said that you've, the thing you just said, where you suddenly felt responsible for something. So how did that change your experience of being an improviser in Missimp?

Liam Webber 40:21

You know, I think like, I think that was the first time where I felt like, I'm not just a person in this. I'm not just a performer. I'm not just a guy who loves improv and brings improv. And I won't just be judged on that. People aren't gonna, I'm not going to look. And I'm not going to look back on my successes with Missimp my failures with Missimp solely based on my artistic and creative output. I'm going to be I'm going to look back and judge myself on the personal element of it and the people within it and. And, there've been like a bunch of stuff that's happened since then, [-] I don't know. I like so much of it serves to just like be like, what I need to do here is distance myself from everyone, in terms of like how close I can be. Can I be friends with people? Probably not. Because someone's going to need to be there to be level headed and someone's going to need to be there when shit goes wrong, who can distance themselves emotionally from what's happening. In a way that protects the most vulnerable people in the situation. And I think that's kind of the responsibility that comes with trying to lead a thing. You know, and I didn't know that I was, I didn't know that that's what I was doing. When I first said yes to running Smash Night. I didn't know that, wanting to do more courses... I'm ambitious, to a fault. And I didn't know that like, trying to run these, this thing and trying to make it more successful, you know, because my problem is I can't look at something and see what it is, I see what it could be. You know, I saw this and I saw improv and I was like, this could be so incredible. You know, this art form offers an opportunity to provide art in such an accessible way to people, right? Like there's no startup costs. You can do this as easily in your living room, as you can in a community centre, or in like, fucking fuck-off theatre space, right? You can do this work to the same standard in any of those three things. You can do it without, you know. There aren't roles written. We write the roles as we go. So like, you don't have the same thing with theatre, it's like, oh, there are only like, you know the ratio of like, good, fun-to-play roles for men to women. You don't have that horrendous, like ratio gap. You don't have the thing like that there's no roles written for black people in improv, you don't have the thing, that there's no roles written for like disabled people in improv. And the moment you see that, the moment you see, like this, like, wonderful possibility that this could be a place where anyone's voice as an artist could be, like, nurtured and cherished and that they could they could take that and put that in front of an audience and, and show truthful experience. Like... When you when you see that and understand that like the... I don't know how anyone can like look at it and not be like this could be fantastic. And this could do so much for so many people. But that ambition comes with this thing of like, if you want this to be for everyone, you have a responsibility to create a space for everyone and you have a responsibility to try to be progressive, to try and like reach a wider variety of people and... And that in itself like coming from like a white dude is inherently problematic and then you're gonna, then you need to like learn that, you have to be able to put your hands up when you're wrong you have to be able to go like, "you know what, fuck it, I didn't do that as well as I could have done. I should have been better there". And thats hard every time and it never gets fucking easier, and, you know. And we're not getting paid for this shit. I do fucking 20-30 hours of admin a week for the variety of different improv projects I do and not one second of it is reimbursed for and I do it because I love it and I do it because I believe in it but like... you know it's fucking hard sometimes when people turn around and they're like... people turn around and fucking call you out on your shit. And sometimes it's

warranted right? Sometimes people are like, you know, "what you fucking done is appalling". Well, not appalling. People, I...

Richard Minkley 46:16

It can feel appalling.

Liam Webber 46:17

Oh yeah. The smallest thing you do wrong feels like, and, especially I'm fucking an obsessive.. You can probably tell from like if you've read this far in the transcript of this fucking interview that like, I'm an obsessive person, that I think about these things a lot and that, you know, I'm the kind of person who, I will go home tonight and I'll be lying awake because I'll be frustrated with the way that I came across in this interview, right? Like, someone comes up to me and is like, you know, "that thing made me feel a bit crap". I'm gonna think about that for the next week. You know, and then, so often, like there are issues come up and like, people complain about things and you're like... And I've put so much in myself into this and so much of myself on the line, trying to help people as well, that when they then turn around and still complain. And like, the nature of it is sometimes, you know, when you're reaching out to a wide variety of people, that some people come here and you don't know what trauma they've experienced. You don't know what has been there and the rest of their life. And sometimes you just turn around and are like, you know, I've spent hours with people, tens of hours with people, over the course of two year periods, trying to like help things. For them to then turn around and just attack. And them to have like, legitimate points in their attack, which is, you know, fine, but for them to also neglect the rest of it, or for people to expect that a small company ran by a group of people who are volunteering their time should be as robust and held to, like, account in exactly the same way as giant corporations who have millions of pounds to spend on lawyers and HR departments. And I'm dealing with this at the age of like fucking 24. I've never had like a job that's required any degree of responsibility that comes close to what I have here. Yeah, I... There are days where I fucking wish I didn't do it. There are weeks and months where I just turn around. I'm like, "Why the fuck am I doing this thing?" You know, and sometimes I don't have an answer for that.

Richard Minkley 48:49

I'm gonna interrupt you there. Because one of the questions that well, the question that I want to end on is, 'Why do you keep Coming back and doing improv', however for you I would like to split it into two parts. So the first part is why do you, why did you keep coming back before, let's say before Smash Night and before you took drop ins? Why did you just keep coming back to do improv with Missimp in Nottingham

Liam Webber 49:26

There's something about the feeling of falling. There's something about the feeling when you're on stage and before the scenes started. And you've got up on stage and you've looked around at the person you're doing a show with, your, person you're about to do a scene with, and you look in their eye and and you know. Not like intellectually but like emotionally and spiritually, you know that was about to happen is gonna be fun. That, you know, before the audience tell you what the scenes can be about that you connect. And theres moments peace where it's like, whatever the fuck happens we're going to be okay. This is gonna be good. That you feel sometimes that's intoxicating and fun. On like a personal note. Improv is my performance art now, really. Where I like, theatre used to hold that space in my life. Music then held that space in my life, then stand up, now improv. And this goes back to when I was fucking like 12. And I'm an anxious person. I'm a nervous person. Everywhere in my life, I feel some degree of like fear. Except on stage. When I'm on stage, I feel clarity. Like, even right now,

like, I feel like there's 1001 voices in my head going like, "you should say this, you shouldn't say this, you should do this, you shouldn't do this." As soon as I'm on stage, whatever the art form has been, as soon as I'm on stage, there's been this clarity of, "There's only one thing I need to do now. Right now. There's only one thing I need to think about right now". And I can be in the moment on stage and face fears on stage in a way that I can't in my real life, that I need. I need the stage. So much. I need to perform so much. And like so many of my like life choices have revolved around. You know, I've been in relationships that have broken down because they don't get that I need this more than I need anything and improves where I do it now. And that might change in the future maybe I don't think it will. I think improv suits me spiritually and philosophically in a way that other art forms haven't. You know. So, to find something that matches both like my philosophical thing of like, what I want is to connect with people, what I enjoy is to have fun and make things up. And to have that also fill the void that is present within and has been present within my life forever. It feels like I've found the space where I exist. That's why I do improv.

Richard Minkley 53:09

And that covers, sort of, one angle of it. But we've also, sort of, found this other angle which started very recently. Where you are responsible, which is a

Liam Webber 53:23

you say very recent. Like, two years.

Richard Minkley 53:26

No, but this is it though. Yeah, I'm covering the last 20 years.

Liam Webber 53:29

Yeah, sure.

Richard Minkley 53:29

And this is the first time recently that's been kind of codified. As these are the, they've become called 'the exec'.

Liam Webber 53:40

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 53:41

So I'm trying to understand as well, why do you keep coming back and doing that side of things?

Liam Webber 53:48

Initially, it was because no one else would do it. No one else had the same ambition I did for improv in the city, really. Maybe Lloydie. He had something akin to it, but, like. I think, where Lloydie is, was, and Lloydie had opportunities that I didn't starting out, right? I didn't have the resource that Lloydie, you know, me and Lloydie when we both, you know, I feel like we're both similar in terms of our ambition. But, we started in very different points in our lives, right, like I started out as a university dropout with no disposable income, you know, like reading Will Hines' blog. Whereas when Lloydie he started out, he had the, like, opportunities to go to UCB and stuff like that. And he met with the maydays out there and he found opportunities to fulfill that ambition outside of the city. Whereas when I started, the only place that it was going to happen was here. And so that's why I started working and like doing the work of it, with Missimp, I think. why do I keep doing it? I feel I owe Missimp something. Maybe I paid

my debt now. But I definitely felt like when I came to Missimp, I was... sad. You know, I was hollowed out by the experience at university. You know, I joke about the fact that like, when I was like there, like my diet consisted of, I would go once a day, from my tiny box room that was like, would struggle to maybe fit this sofa in right like, I would go from that room to the co op to buy a frozen cheesecake. Take it home, wait for it to thaw. Eat the cheesecake, go back to bed. That was my day. It's funny, right? It's funny, but sad.

Richard Minkley 55:50

There is, yeah.

Liam Webber 55:52

Or like, you know, and that was when my sleeping troubles started was at university and stuff like. And so like, you know, I came back, just like, I didn't feel like me anymore. You know, up until then I'd been confident I, you know, I had the, you know, I could get on stage and do shows and like, perform and have fun and love it. I wrote music and songs. And the music we played was all upbeat and cheerful and happy. And, I was, you know, I wasn't top of my class, but I was pretty fucking good. You know, top 70% in like, you know, doing [field] physics and maths and chemistry in German, right? Like, I was like, I'm smart, I'm talented, I don't look horrendous. I was like, I can do anything, at the age of 18. And I came back at 19 with none of that, right? Like, all of that was taken away. And I think, you know, why did Dummy connect with me? It's because like I said, like, you know, at that time in my life, I think I needed someone to turn around to me and say like, you're enough. And they were the people did it and improv was the place that happened. And Missimp, and because of Missimp, right like. Missimp brought Dummy here, and it wasn't just me. Like Dummy were a big part of that, but like. The doing of improv gave me something that I felt like I had worth in and again. That I felt like I was good at again. People told me, you know, I made I made people laugh again. Which was something I'd felt I'd lost. I feel like I owe Missimp a lot because at a time when I was a nightmare, they took me in and gave me a home. And a lot of why I still do it is because like, you know, it's hard and it's so hard sometimes. And, you questioned by everyone and you doubt yourself, but. It gave me back me, you know. And if you could do that for me, then maybe you can do it someone else. Fuck, sorry.

Richard Minkley 58:39

I think that I think that's a good place to end on, shall we? Thank you very much for your time.

Liam Webber 58:43

It's okay.

10.2. Interview 2 of 2

a) Parts 1 of 3

25th September 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, improv, nottingham, ran, fucking, night, performing, smash, exec, minder, bit, shows, idea, nick, Marilyn, happened, talking, organisation, courses, 20th anniversary

SPEAKERS

Richard Minkley, Liam Webber

Richard Minkley 00:00

I'm recording here. Great. So it is Friday the 25th of September. At three minutes past one, this is Richard Minkley interviewing Liam Webber for the Missimp oral history project. Okay, let's jump straight into it. So to begin with, when did you first realise that you were kind of taking on a leadership role with Missimp?

Liam Webber 00:29

Um, that's, that's that's hard to say really. Um It's so it started out with I ran I by so before, when I was first doing the very first like, just coming along to Missimp stuff, I was I was doing quite a bit of like, stand up. And I had been in a band for like, the last five years or whatever. So I had lots of relationships with a variety of people who ran venues or organised gigs or whatever in the city. And almost entirely by chance, I wound up talking to a guy called Stephen, who basically they, these two guys who used to run what's called alley cafe, I think it was called, yeah, the vegan place. Off Angel road. they decided that they were going to buy and do up the angel, which I performed in as a music venue a bunch of times, but like it was a real its a fucking metal bar you know, it was like, bit grim. a bit seedy, it had like a real energy to it, though. And like the space upstairs was fun. So

Richard Minkley 01:52

it's interesting looking over the comments,

Liam Webber 01:54

then, Stephen.

Richard Minkley 01:56

It's interesting that you were saying they felt a bit seedy. I was just looking over your previous interview. It's just across the across the road from the corner, which you described in your last interview as equally, if not more seedy, and gross. But yeah, you would just want to say what was um,

Liam Webber 02:11

yeah.

Richard Minkley 02:12

What were the names of the guys who moved from the alley cafe? alley cafe? Do you remember their names?

Liam Webber 02:18

Yeah, so I think Ben is the guy who actually like ran the alley cafe. And Steven had done events there. And they kind of came over as a duo to work on the angel. And they now run the, oh well, Ben and Steven kind of fell out. I don't really, I don't really know what happened there. But like, Ben now runs the angel and also the Golden Fleece. But yeah, so I kind of got into the real ground floor. Like while they were still renovating the angel, like knocking and they were like, they fully knocked walls down and did a lot to the space. And I wound up, I can't remember I cannot remember for the life of me how I wound up chatting to Stephen. But I, you know, I got chatting to him. He was like d'you wanna do a show here. And I just said, Yes. Not knowing what I was going to do or anything like that. And didn't think about it for four months, five months. he was like, do you want to do a show online whenever it was like 29th of March, I think was the date. And I was like, Yeah, sure. And this was in like maybe October, November time, and I didn't think about it at all until like February when he was like, still want to do that show. And I was like, Oh, fuck. So then I took it to like, the guys who were running Missimp at the time, which was really Nick and Parky and Marilyn, I guess. But it wasn't, [the] axis was Nick and Parky. And said, Look, I want to do this show. and they we're both initially quite, well, Nick was less reluctant. But I think that there was a there was some resistance there. But I was like, Look, I'm gonna do it. either I do it with Missimp or i, or I don't but I'm gonna do this show. and they kind of relented. And let me run this show. And so and that was kind of like how smash night started. And first smash night we ran was it was a huge success. I think it was on a Tuesday night. worked really well. Steven was like, Oh, you got a we got a tonne of people in the room. So Steven was like, we want to have you back. How do you want to do this and talking to Steve and it was like they wanted us to do a monthly show and I was like sick. That works for me. And again, Missimp were a bit reticent about me running this monthly show but I like again its basically just said like look, either I'm going to do it with you or I'm just going to do it because it's a cool opportunity for an improv show in nottingham then at that point, we didn't really have any regular shows happening. Lloydie was working on the residency with the Playhouse but we didn't really have we just moved from the corner to the malt cross like a couple months before. And we'd found new people had started to come and more people would you know, now we were in a nicer venue more people had started to actually stick around and do stuff. We had way more people within the community doing stuff. rhymes, had just kind of kicked off. I think Vox had maybe started around then as well, maybe. Maybe Vox came a little bit later.

Richard Minkley 05:22

So this is around about 2016. It sounds like 2016 in my head is when the Malt cross switchover

Liam Webber 05:30

yeah

Richard Minkley 05:30

happens. Is does that sound about right? For you?

Liam Webber 05:35

Yeah, probably, I can probably check. Just give us like, three seconds, I'll be able to find the pictures which will be time stamped.

Richard Minkley 05:50

It is interesting. I'm gonna. while you look up that I'm going to ramble while I figure out what the question is. But it's interesting. You said quite early on in that story that you just had relationships around. And I'm curious what

Liam Webber 06:07

2017 So its March 2017 was the first

Richard Minkley 06:08

2017? first smash night

Liam Webber 06:12

[2017] was the first smash night I believe? Yeah. 27th of March. Not the 29th

Richard Minkley 06:19

27th.

Liam Webber 06:19

Yeah, that's right.

Richard Minkley 06:20

Nice. Um,

Liam Webber 06:22

yeah.

Richard Minkley 06:23

I'm interested how,

Liam Webber 06:24

and we, and it must have been Yeah, cuz Vox pops performed?

Richard Minkley 06:30

Oh, yeah, maybe so

Liam Webber 06:31

Doesn't look like you were in that show? but Vox Pops performed.

Richard Minkley 06:33

No, I joined about a year after vox pops started, but so you describe it as having relationships with people in the community. And you kind of broadly I'm assuming, is it like, music, venues basically, or venues more generally.

Liam Webber 06:53

So I, you know, I'd, I'd done. So I was in a band from like, 2012 till 20, 2017 2018. I can never really remember when the band kind of like, kicked its clogs, but was around them. And we went for around four years. And we just performed a lot and like, made a lot of connections, you know, we we were one of we were kind of like a stupid and self conscious party band. So we just played like fun, upbeat music. And so we were kind of quite popular with a number of promoters who just wanted like, you know, like, if they wanted a good time band, we were a good, good fit for those kinds of gigs. So we got to know a lot of people through that. And then I was also doing stand up around the same time. And so I met a bunch of different people in slightly different venues doing stand up stuff, you know, different comedians but also different like, actual like people who owned venues or people who, promoters who ran nights. And then also before I'd before I did either of those things I did a tonne of like Youth Theatre within the city with with the Nottingham Youth Theatre and the thing about that was that the person who ran that was incredibly well connected in the art scene in Nottingham and we would do like we'd wind up doing weird gigs for like not the council house we'd be we'd dress up and like do bit bits from like fucking Shakespeare or whatever on the council house steps. So all is different

Richard Minkley 08:29

Ah yes, Shakespeare and his comedy bits

Liam Webber 08:33

Yeah, just like you know, classic little bits just fucking oberon just pouring shit into people's eyes. not quite. but.

Richard Minkley 08:42

so what would you say then it was. because it seems like this is something I'm trying to understand to understand how it then knock on effected Missimp is that it seems that you from what you've said you performed which got meant you've got to know people which then meant you knew who the people were to talk to to get a venue. Is that a fair way of putting it, both for youth theatre, stand up, music?

Liam Webber 09:12

to a degree Yeah, I think you know, like a lot of a lot of like so you gotta remember where Missimp was at the time you know, it was doing what what like its output was was we did Thursday nights. rhymes it started and may be done a couple of shows. We hadn't really done many shows by that point. Maybe millions of voices was kind of still was was going but like again, that wasn't a regular thing that just like one off shows every now and then in your head. vox will have just started so if vox were performing I think their audition process will have been in like maybe November, December time. And they ran one course a year. Maybe Like, you know, I didn't I did the level one course and then it was maybe about 18 months to two years before I was doing a level two course, right, like, that was fairly standard. But you wonder you actually it's we started to get a number of people within the community who were wanting to take this thing that they were doing on Thursdays and put it on stage and they didn't really there wasn't really a space to do that there wasn't really a show that was happening it wasn't a regular show occurring. And so the idea for smash night was that it would be this like slightly experimental night of we're going to get people to come get on actually get onstage in front of an actual audience and perform in an actual venue. And if you want to put on a show the limiting factor is where do you do it right?

Richard Minkley 10:49

Yes,

Liam Webber 10:50

that's the the be all and all and so like me having those connections and those people who would just like ask me like, Oh, we need we've got this new space we could do with some someone doing stuff that was was a useful thing. And so really what happened was like there was no formal process for me becoming like pull it back to like the very initial question there was no like formal like you going to become a member there wasn't a fucking exec. It was just Nick and Parky running shit. I think Parky described it at one point as a benevolent dictatorship. And it's like, whatever. But because I started to run this thing, like, suddenly, I needed to be at the suddenly, like, I say, I needed to be at the meetings, they never had fucking meetings, right. Like, they turned up on Thursdays and occasionally texted about what they wanted to do.

Richard Minkley 11:52

That's interesting.

Liam Webber 11:53

So yeah, and so I kind of forced my way in by by having that thing that was suddenly my responsibility. That was incredibly successful and popular within the community as well. And started to bring in new people into the community as well.

Richard Minkley 12:11

That's really interesting. oh sorry, carry on. Yeah.

Liam Webber 12:16

No, and I think like that, that was kind of just how how it worked, right? That was just like, like, I just wind up forcing my way in. and I think in my my doing that, you know, because Lloydie had, Lloydie had had been in and out of this kind of weird leadership

Richard Minkley 12:40

thing,

Liam Webber 12:41

You know, Nick and Parky is, whatever was going on, really, with their, i know Lloydie had done some stuff with them, like a couple years before and fallen out. But you know, me unloaded onto both in rhymes. And he was he'd he'd managed to wrangle it he wrangled the Malt Cross, first of all, for Missimp. And then he also wrangled the Playhouse and I think those two things kind of, they probably predated what I did, but I think the fact that I then done something similar with smash night, kind of forced us into this position where it was like, [oh okay],

Richard Minkley 13:23

so when, at the time there

Liam Webber 13:24

there are more people working

Richard Minkley 13:26

at the time, when you set up smash night, did you know about the other venues that Missimp had been and the other gigs? They're done? Like, obviously, mainly The Glee Club, but other projects? Basically, they'd worked on in other spaces? Or was it just sort of like, as if it was Year Zero? Almost?

Liam Webber 13:48

Yeah. I mean, I didn't, you know, like, you'd hear about, like, you know, you'd, you had heard, there's someone who like so, I came, I came after they stopped doing the Glee Club stuff. By the time I started. You know, that collapsed, I think, maybe a few months before my first turned up. And you'd I'd heard that they'd had a residency at the Glee Club. And you know, people had, and everyone was being, you know, not everyone, but certain people were very, well, The Glee Club were dreadful with us and didn't treat us right. There was always a bit of me that was like having having organised stuff and ran stuff before but on gigs and everything. So if you're getting a venue for free then. especially like a venue like the Glee Club for free, just like you fucking you do what you need to do in order to stay in there, right. Whatever. that had fallen through, so I knew that there had been like this past and like, you know, they talked about like how they'd done stuff for light night occasionally or they'd done shows for light night and like How they used to have shows that what was it called the arts organisation, which is now

Richard Minkley 15:04

Hopkinson's,

Liam Webber 15:06

Hopkinson's Gallery and stuff like that, where you're like, they clearly, you know, like, I turned up. And it was like, they'd clearly used to do all this stuff. And now they've kind of just settled into this thing. And it's like, it's the same ten people who turn up on a Thursday, mostly just to hang out and do this. And while there is something nice about that, that that wasn't what appealed to me, I wanted to perform, I wanted to actually be on a stage doing this in front of an audience. And like, unlike that kind of ambition, caused problems, and most notably me and Parky, very rarely saw eye to eye. regularly argued

Richard Minkley 15:49

this, to kind of bring us back into the history timeline a little bit. Let's go back to the beginning of the Glee, not The Glee Club, smash night, we've just you, you described it as that there was like a four month period where you completely forgot that you just told some people randomly that you were going to give them a show, by the sounds of it, you have literally no plans as of what you were doing. They were just going to give you a room, and you needed to do a thing. Is that basically the brief?

Liam Webber 16:26

That's, that's accurate.

Richard Minkley 16:27

Yeah. So when

Liam Webber 16:29

Yeah, it was, you know, again, it's one of those things where it's like, you know, you get that from being a face that people know, and a face that people are like, Ah, you know, we can, you can trust him that he's going to put on, if he says he's going to do something, he's probably going to do something, and there'll probably be an audience there, right, like, you know, either be it in comedy or music, I'd kind of managed to wrangle that as being the general consensus. Initially, it was a stand up night that I was going to do. And by the time it got round, to like, February, March time, in 2017, I think I was a bit I was already feeling like a pull away from doing stand up as a thing. And like, I didn't really

want to do just another classic standard night with a bunch of 10 minute slots, plus a headliner, you know, exactly what they're doing at the canal house, or Glee or everywhere else, you know, so, you know, it was one of these things where, and also, it seemed just easiest for me to be like, if I just put on an improv show, I can just get the team that I'm performing in the team that Ben runs, and then we'll just get a bunch of other people on stage. And it'll just be easy. You know, so it was kind of a mixture of actual artistic vision with the path of least resistance, I have this space, I probably ought to use this space, how I'm going to do that, you know,

Richard Minkley 17:56

so the idea of having slots of like, two teams and a bunch of people that did the idea come from Originally, the idea of a stand up lineup where you have lots of little slots for different stand ups.

Liam Webber 18:12

Yeah, I suppose. You know, it was about like, that's what you do. And then also, it was like, if I put this on, and it's just one team performing. It's less of an audience. You know, like, if I can get two teams performing, that's twice as many people you know, which is twice as many audience members coming in, which means that the bar downstairs are going to be like, Oh, shit, these guys actually. You know, so there's, there's a mixture of like, yeah, it came from stand up, and it came from like, you know, I don't I've been doing mixed bills for two years or whatever.

Richard Minkley 18:46

Yeah,

Liam Webber 18:47

but, but it was also like, what's gonna, how am I gonna? How am I gonna, with like, you know, like I said, like, it came to this idea, like, with a month to go maybe. And it was, like I said, it's Nick and Parky. And they were like, yeah, okay, you can do it. Nick rustled up some graphics within like, maybe 24 hours. I think he'd got me the Smash night logo.

Richard Minkley 19:14

And that logo is the one with the one with the broken glass in the words. oh wow. Nick did quite a good job on that one.

Liam Webber 19:21

even like actually even. he fucking nailed it. Well, I mean, like, it was his idea is like, smash night. The name was his idea. And the branding was his idea. I was like, I've got a show. I know. I know, the show I want to run,

Richard Minkley 19:32

huh.

Liam Webber 19:33

I was like, you know, mixed bill improv night and he was like, well, how does smash night sound? And I was like, yeah, that works. And then he had the, he had the logo, you know, it was very, that side of it was very easy. And actually, you know, I think maybe, maybe I'm doing this slight disservice in terms of, particularly the first one, they were like, okay, we can do this show. It was definitely when it was like, when it became apparent, like I was like, we're gonna do this as a monthly night. That was some

pushback on like that classic. erm, well, we don't want to be doing too much we don't want it to hurt
The other shows, x y and Z. which i proved wrong.

Richard Minkley 20:13

So I was gonna say so that one didn't turn out to be as true as they thought it would be. you were able to grow it a little bit more.

Liam Webber 20:22

Well This, this is it like that this is a this is a classic like flaw with the way people think about improv. And like, generally speaking the way the the flaw in how Missimp had been operating up until that point was that their assumption was there's a finite number of people in Nottingham who wants to come to improv shows. And they'd whittled that finite number down to now it's only 10 people in Nottingham who want to come to improv shows. Because the time at the, because of the way that they handled the Glee residency, and the way that that collapsed. But that's just stupid, right? That's, that's just dumb. The idea that improv can only be enjoyed played fucking, like 15 people out of a city of 400,000 is insane. Like, like, and I think it was just like, I don't know, whether it was a lack of ambition, or just a simple like that. They wanted the shows that people came to, to beat the shows that they were in. And the fear around that.

Richard Minkley 21:30

so

Liam Webber 21:30

I don't know. But either either way, like everything, everything you look at, says the same thing, which is like, if you build a thing, and you if you're putting on a show, that's good quality on a regular with regularity, you'll build a, you'll build some kind of following. You know, and you'll know, or you'll at the very least you'll know whether you're building a following after six months, right?

Richard Minkley 21:49

Yeah,

Liam Webber 21:54

after six shows, you know, people will come to the first show, because they're your mates and everything, people will come to the second show, because they made but by the time you get to six or seven months down the line, maybe you're getting into winter, now it's bit colder, or the weather's shit, you know, and there's still 30 people turning up at the door. And everyone on stage is still having a great time. And the company is still only making money from this because we get the room for free. And then it becomes then it's just like a different deal. Right. And that was that was it, I knew that I knew that one, I had 100% belief in the fact that it would work. I just knew it would because the community at the time was yearning, it needed a place where people could actually get onstage and perform in a route for people who, who weren't in like the performing the what was the single performing group really, at the time, to get stage time and get on stage. And smash night social club offered that. So it became very popular with like the wider community. But also, like you knew, like I knew it was gonna work. And I knew I and it was just a case of like, I needed six months to prove it. And to prove that this thing had longevity and as it was like The show ran for almost three years, you know,

Richard Minkley 23:13

WOW

Liam Webber 23:14

provided the format which has been taken on by a number of shows around the UK, and you can look at different shows around the UK, like little Chicago and

Richard Minkley 23:27

Sheffield,

Liam Webber 23:28

Sheffield. Like that sprang up a few months after Charlie and Joe came down and performed it smash night with Stürke and stuff like that. And you know, we I feel like, we probably weren't the only people doing that kind of show. We weren't the only reason like that that became a popularised format. But we proved that it worked and and a number of people did go away and take it because because it was successful. The way that smash night evolved from being a show that was about like the idea and originally it was like this is our experimental show this is that we're just going to put some stuff on and fuck around like, particularly the first few months if you look at the lineups, there was just like different groupings from within the community doing like

Richard Minkley 24:10

I'm gonna put a pin in this idea because I want to just rewind the thing a back back, rewind the tape a little bit. Before we go on to the the. It seems that we're two shows the single show that you have and you pulled together, and then you got the chance to do it again. Like regularly. What was the first show? Like do you remember anything from that show? Oh, that was a you made the face of someone who doesn't remember?

Liam Webber 24:40

Yeah, I'm very bad for remembering any of any any shows that I'm in. Like I hosted the show. I don't think I performed in it. And it was about like, we had rhymes, Vox and social Club and the social club that month, really was a number of members of rhymes. A couple members of Vox maybe and then a couple of wider community members like it, you know, it wasn't it was it, you know, it was the prototype. And then we we looked at it and we're like, Okay, this is what. we hadn't yet clocked on to the.

Richard Minkley 25:24

So

Liam Webber 25:25

you know, the aim, which by the end was like, how do we get the maximum number of performance, both from nothing and elsewhere to get on stage at the same night, you know, that that's what became the like, when me and Dave were running it towards the end. That's, that's kind of what, what happened. We had a really good turnout, a lot of people turned up and paid to watch, which we weren't necessarily expecting. It was the first time Missimp had done anything with Facebook paid advertising. That was my

Richard Minkley 25:56

really,

Liam Webber 25:57

I think, yeah, I think I actually I actually just paid for it. And I think for the first few months of smash night, I just paid out of my own pocket for and then reimbursement. And then so, first few, I paid out my own pocket. And then after that, I would reimburse myself from the tickets, and then sometime later, I was actually given access to the bank account, so I could just pay it from Missimp.

Richard Minkley 26:23

Oh, that's interesting. So these

Liam Webber 26:26

there is probably a good metaphor for like, my gradual seeping into the actual exec and like actual. I mean, it wasn't the fucking exec and execs my fault as well. The reason it's called the exec is my fault,

Richard Minkley 26:38

is that you? Well, when we get to that part, we'll that will be interesting. But before we move on, there's two ideas of what to dig in to the Facebook one, but first, smash nights social club, it feels almost like a show within a show. So where did that particular idea come from? And I'm not talking about because it seems that you have discovered a purpose for smash night as you've gone on. Because in the beginning, it was just like you have a space throw some things in it. So where did smash night begin in that? morass?

Liam Webber 27:14

Well the, so the social club came from the Social Club was there from the very first, you know, when it was called that, from the first thing I called it that as a reference to there's there's a, there's a, there was a very prominent improv team in Chicago in like the early to mid 2000s, called the Cook County social club, who, like a big deal. And so like, I called it a smash night social club is kind of like, tongue in cheek homage to them, I guess. Really, it was just like, let's get, let's just throw together a bunch of people. And our thought originally was that we'd maybe throw together a bunch of people from the two different teams, which is, again, like a thing that a number of shows do, not so much this side of the Atlantic, but like in Chicago, there's like a real history of, of teams do this. So like that one team will open for the other team. And then either in the middle of the show, or at the very end of the show, they'll do a set a very short set together. And they'll met there's a number of formats, like the nightmare or sometimes they just do freeze tag, which I always think looks kind of weird, but whatever. And they do, they do these like pieces where it's like, both the headline team and the newer performers, and it's a way for them to get to play together, which, which is quite nice. And so I think we were kind of tapping into that kind of like, this is how they do it over there. This is how there's been some amount of success.

Richard Minkley 28:49

So you said that

Liam Webber 28:50

I mean, you know, like,

Richard Minkley 28:52

sorry, no, you were say something.

Liam Webber 28:55

Sorry, you're crackeling up.

Richard Minkley 28:58

Yeah, I've realised I'm sharing my very poor quality Internet with my secret flatmate. Oh, God, I need to make sure I publish this after I leave otherwise, I'm gonna get in trouble with my landlord. Oh, that's gonna be going down in history. Nevermind Yeah, so first mash night was a success. And then you got offered a regular slot. Now before we discuss the Well actually, we've already discussed how that's got you into the exec a little bit. What was the show that you were forming? We're still at the angel.

Liam Webber 29:37

Sorry event you've absolutely cut out now.

Richard Minkley 29:40

Sorry, can you Am I audible? Can you hear me?

Liam Webber 29:45

Yeah, I can just about

Richard Minkley 29:46

so we're still in the angel. What was the more regular smash night like

Liam Webber 29:55

it started off kind of the same, right like it was two local teams plus a plus the social club at the end. And again, like, you know, the first few months, it was about like, Okay, this is, you know, this is going well, the community really, you know, we're getting, we're getting a good number of people turn up. And the good thing was that, like, the best thing was that they would turn up on the Wednesday night for smash night, and they'd still turn up on the Thursday night, the day after, which was, which was big for me proving my point, which was good for me. I don't know if that actually matters. But I was pleased that I was right. And eventually, like, you know, we didn't have that many performing teams in Nottingham at the time. Like we had vox and rhymes were the only two who were rehearsing. And so you very quickly ran out of ideas that people wanted to do, you know, me and Lloydie did the clones and lee, john and Mitchell did a weird show together. A couple of stuff like that kind of happened, which was, which was great. It was really great

Richard Minkley 31:11

were those things that you asked them to do? Or did they come to you and say, Hey, we've got,

Liam Webber 31:16

we kind of put out the call, we put out the call, I think we were like, Look, we've got this regular show, if you want to do a show, that's like 15 minutes to 20 minutes long. Let us know. And we'll we'll give you a slot and we got a number of people be like, yeah, I want to do it. We also just got a number of people being like, I don't really have a show, but I'd like to be in the Smash tonight social club. And I think that kind of pushed us towards Okay, we start to understand what this smash night social club can be.

Richard Minkley 31:40

I see.

Liam Webber 31:41

But then eventually, it just became like, we don't really have enough shows. So like, let's ask, like the, our, our neighbours to come down, let's ask the same faces to come down and perform, let's ask, nice to come and perform, let's ask. You know, and it was just like, I just went on the internet and looked, and I was like, Who's what what teams are there that might want to come and perform and we found like, and stuff like that. And I think when we really hit it was the January after. So that would be January 2018 was when the dreaming came. And then it was like oh, we can get it's not just like the local teams that we can, you know, not that the local teams were particularly bad or anything like that. Obviously, they, they did a great job because the show kept going. And we built like these wonderful connections with other improvisers from like, other areas. But the dreaming came and they performed on they were on like a different level. They were doing something that I don't think anyone had ever done in Nottingham before. You know, this kind of like, properly organic, ridiculous show.

Richard Minkley 32:46

So you've I'm gonna

Liam Webber 32:48

you watch that.

Richard Minkley 32:49

Sorry, I'm, I got you mid reminiscence. I'm sorry about that. But I'm just going to quickly pull out some details there. So you said same faces. And we know who nice is? Who the same faces just briefly, because it sounds like we need to talk about the dreaming a little bit. Who are the same faces? Yeah, the same.

Liam Webber 33:07

The same faces are a team from Leicester, who do short form stuff. And they're just like, really? They're just our closest neighbours, you know?

Richard Minkley 33:17

Yeah. So and who are the dream,

Liam Webber 33:20

I might be able to so the dreaming are a three person show from? What's it called? London. Slash. I think I can't remember if I let Alex was Alex was still in. And basically I've gone down and done like a workshop in London. Me and Lloydie actually gone down with Scott Adset. And I met him Alex Fradera and I actually met Mara, Mara joy there as well, that same evening, and we were just chatting and I was like, oh, man, it'd be so great to get you guys to come to Nottingham. And they were both just like, yeah, we'd love to come and like that was something that I don't think I'd ever really considered before was like this fact that like people might want to travel. Like, not just like 45 minutes, but like, they might want to travel, you know, Mara's based in Edinburgh. I was like shit, what the fuck. And so like, and so we just basically I just basically put them in there. And then I was like, Look, we'll get some dates for next year. But it'll probably be the last Wednesday of the month. Do either of you fancy doing it? And I think that so in 2018 I think the dreaming came and did January and Mara came and did either. I think Mara came and did February because Mara wound up getting stranded here because she flew and then it snowed loads and she just spent a week in, in Nottingham living at Lloydie's flat and I think like between those two shows like that Just raised the ambition level of like what we could be doing with

smash night, but also like what we could be doing in Nottingham, like, suddenly smashing it, we realised that smash night could be this window into, like, the interesting improv that's happening elsewhere in the UK, and bring it to Nottingham. And then you'd see like, the way that it affected, the nottingham scene, and like you'd go, you'd turn up to the Thursday the next day, and people would be doing shit in a similar style to what the dreaming did the night before. And you'd be like, this is really cool. This is like, this is how, you know, it became a thing of like, this is how this is maybe one of the best ways we can up skill and like, like, bring, like fresh ideas and something new to Nottingham's, it was improv scene, which I think had been missing. Because, you know, while for a long time, right like that, just an ugly show. And they played the same game that The Glee Club and that just and gorilla burger where it was short form. And we'd started to do long form stuff with, you know, Lloydie had been away a lot of places and brought back some of the long form stuff from there. And we started to get a vibe for that stuff. As well, but like I really think that it was the bringing of and it coincided with a number of cool teachers coming to Nottingham as well, right like Lydia Hensler and Dummy. So this they, they both came to Nottingham, that same like January 2018, February 2018, there was like this, it was like suddenly we'd gone from having like, that time, the year before there had been like maybe one improv show every three months. And suddenly, we had this thing where it was like, we've got improv workshops happening every weekend and fucking like, shows happening every other week. And there was just this and that going on. It was like, suddenly, you just had this thing of like this as well, and probably nothing could be. it was quite exciting.

Richard Minkley 36:52

Wow. That's very interesting. I've got a couple points to pull out there. I suppose for the first one, you said that the dreaming came around about January 2018? I believe? Which, yeah, I mean, not yet. Yeah, it would have been the year of the 20th anniversary, which is interesting. And you you were describing it as all of these big things happening? Did this have any effect on the rest of Missimp? You've already mentioned that some the teams got a chance to perform and that people got a chance to perform. But did it affect the courses or the well courses we may come to in a minute but the workshops

Liam Webber 37:35

it all kind of feeds into all the same stuff, right? Like, what happened was like smash night over 2017 happened. We had Playhouse shows over 2017 happening. We had a number of other bit shows kind of go on and like and stuff like that. And what it what it culminated in really was the formation of the exec happening where it was by the end of 2018 you'd got this group that would have been you know, me, Lloydie Parky, Nick, Marilyn, Emily and Minder would have been like this really had wound up in this like, collective group who were, and there was a lot of discomfort with that, because it represented a huge change, in how, Missimp operated and how the decisions within Missimp were made. And yeah, so you had that that kind of happen. And I think that process over 2017 of like, it became a thing of like, we would start to have actual meetings where we discuss potential future stuff. And I think, you know, we probably I think Lloydie introduced slack and suddenly we had this way of like, talking constantly to each other about ideas. And every is everything had its own like fucking like tensions with it and there was strife and no one ever got on. But actually you wound up like, we wound up really changing the way Missimp operated and

Richard Minkley 39:26

so

Liam Webber 39:26

it became we started to run we ran more courses.

Richard Minkley 39:30

So the so things like more courses and more structured things like that came after the formation of this exec I take it

Liam Webber 39:40

you know, like it's very difficult to put like an actual date on everything really from like because not like I say formation of the exec but that's an entirely like retrospective look on it. Like in reality, it was a very it was a really quite like fluid. There was never a point where we there was never a point where we sat down and went like, this is the group who are, it was like, you know, Lloydie was pushing to do stuff. I was pushing to do stuff Emily was pushing to do stuff. Ben was pushing to do stuff. you know,

Richard Minkley 40:14

would it be safe to say,

Liam Webber 40:15

bam bam bam bam bam there were all these?

Richard Minkley 40:17

I was about to say, what do we say? So what was Minder doing as well,

Liam Webber 40:21

man, just like that, it was just gonna be the same, you know, she was like, really pushing hard to get,

Richard Minkley 40:25

because it seems that I was about to say, so that the growth of the executive growth of the courses would have been things, lots of things happening in parallel in the same environment. But I have a feeling that could then be a wider metaphor for what Missimp was becoming. So it wasn't just the process of lots of things happening, but it was becoming lots of things happening in parallel.

Liam Webber 40:46

This is this is this is it. Yeah, it became like, and it wasn't necessarily that we were doing anything that was like, particularly brand new to what Missimp had done before, right. Missimp it always brought in external teachers Missimp it always ran some level of courses. Missimp had always done this Missimp had always done shows and simpler, you know, x y, z, you know, it always done these things. were suddenly we were doing it with greater frequency and with maybe greater ambition, you know, there was a bigger scale on stuff. It was like, Well, people will pay 50 pounds for an improv workshop, if it's really good. Like, like, let's, that's fine. Let's like commit into that. You know,

Richard Minkley 41:24

okay.

Liam Webber 41:25

And it became like, how do we run the courses? You know, and there was, you know, and you've also like, got to remember that it coincided with like, a boom in the number of people in the Missimp community, it was, you know, going from like I said, like, the year before, maybe like, 10, 15, 20 people to like, suddenly, we had like, maybe 60, 70 people, a lot of those people were saying, like, we

want to be performing, we recognise that maybe we don't have the skills that the people who are performing regularly do have. provide us with those skills. Right. And so the course,

Richard Minkley 41:55

yeah,

Liam Webber 41:55

that's doing more courses, and stuff like that. And so all of these things kind of like, just like, it was kind of, like, [they would] fit in. And this is all just how I remember it might I might be entirely wrong.

Richard Minkley 42:09

okay.

Liam Webber 42:09

But it kind of just, like, came together a bit. And, you know, and like I said, like, it was really fractious, you know, and though there were a lot of arguments, and a lot of people falling out and, you know, we didn't understand how to deal with it, I think and, you know, it took us a long time to work out to deal with particularly like the hygiene around like, I my life and my, like personal working times a different to other people's, you know, I'm quite nocturnal. My life allowed me to be quite nocturnal. So like, I would just be like, I've been thinking about this stuff at like, 2am. into slack, I didn't put an expectation that everyone else would be awake at 2am. But like, it pushes, you know, people get like, anxious when they see someone. Well, he's working at two am, should I be, you know, all of that shit. And like

Richard Minkley 43:06

2am you get a ding on your phone, saying Lee's doing some work.

Liam Webber 43:10

We didn't fucking talk about it. Because like we like it wasn't like it wasn't wasn't an official thing. It was just a thing that kind of like sprawled and grown. And that led to a lot of tensions and eventually led to Parky, Parky, like leaving thing in early, because that would have been January, February time.

Richard Minkley 43:37

So there's, there's lots of interesting things there. I'm going to try and pull it together, because we're coming to the end of the first half of this particular interview section. To bring it back to this idea of like, multiple lots of things going on, Hello,

Liam Webber 43:55

yeah, you're just you're going baAaAaAgh?

Richard Minkley 44:00

That is my interview style. I'm sorry. Okay, so you have, we use this phrase where we said lots of things going on in different spaces. And that was what Missimp was becoming. And there's also a sense that you're describing the exec in that way as well. That the exec consisted of lots of people doing lots of things in different places. And that that wasn't necessarily the culture that was great to work in. Is that fair to say?

Liam Webber 44:33

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 44:36

I'm aware that I'm basically putting this idea into your head a little bit, but it did does strike me that there was lots of things happening that weren't necessarily coordinated.

Liam Webber 44:48

Yes, I think you know, really, if you if you look at the what the problems were, like, if you boil it down, it was that you know, you had six different people and seven different people sat around the table, talking about what they want, what they. We were making decisions about what Missimp should do, without necessarily having a actual conversation about what we want Missimp to be and having an agreed vision together of what Missimp would be.

Richard Minkley 45:25

I see.

Liam Webber 45:26

which comes about from the fact that like, like we've met, we've naturally accrued this group of people, but because they were doing stuff, and that stuff wasn't necessarily in kinda conjunction with each other, like, was pulling in slightly different ways, and satisfying, slightly different ideas of maybe what Missimp could be or what Missimp should be, what Missimp is. All of those things we didn't you know, and it. you know, there's so much stuff looking back that I'm like, If I'd known then what I know now, right, like,

Richard Minkley 46:01

Yeah,

Liam Webber 46:02

but problem is I learned all the stuff I know now by fucking dealing with this shit, right? Like,

Richard Minkley 46:07

yeah,

Liam Webber 46:08

catch 22. You know, there's, but it's like, yeah, we didn't have this coherent vision of what we wanted Missimp to be. Which meant that you wound up with these things, feeling like you, you described it as not coordinated. And there's a degree to which That's true. But the also, the other problem was because everyone's vision was different. Everyone wanted a piece in every pie. Everyone wanted, everyone had to have a say in every single item, every single project. Which meant that no, there was it felt very much like there wasn't really a whole lot of like, trust necessarily, between everyone with it, you know, and you'd naturally split into these fucking factions, because, you know, me and Lloydie worked together quite extensively. And we had this similar quite ambitious idea of like, we both we want, we want the Missimp to be a fucking like proper, quote, unquote, improv theatre, you know, we're talking, right?

Richard Minkley 47:07

Yeah.

Liam Webber 47:09

Producing improv theatre, like they have in the States. And that wasn't, that wasn't what Nick wanted, or indeed wants, you know, like that, you know, Nick wants a place that's, you can go on a Thursday, that's with his friends, and he's happy to facilitate elements of it, but he didn't want it to be like this fucking like, business. You know, and, and there's like, stuff about, like, you know, when problems about come about when you've got like, people in different parts of their lives, right, like, you know, I was in a very different, you know, I was fucking what, 22, 23 in a very different space in my life to Nick and Marilyn, who were in their late 30s, or Parky, who had a child or, you know, and so you wind up with like these things where it was like, Well, me and Lloydie both had this a similar degree of freedom within our lives in a similar level of like, we love improv, we think it can be really great. We think there's something special in Nottingham, let's make this thing a really professional outfit. Let's be really ambitious with our output Let's be really ambitious with who we try and bring into Nottingham to teach and stuff like that. You know, Emily was much further towards like, her interest was very much like from the get go and she wanted to start the female Harold team and improve with like the number of women performing an improv in Nottingham. Minder kind of came on board. Really again, like kind of my fault she was pretty instrumental at the beginning with I think getting smash night Its success in terms of like her knowledge of like marketing and events, planning and stuff like that. A lot of that went into like, how we market smash night, how we market, you know, from like, what the logo looks like to what the you know, what pictures, we put up a performance and audience members and stuff like that, right? Like, all the marketing theory behind,

Richard Minkley 49:07

I do want to come back. I think minder's contribution there and the things you were doing on Facebook, I need to have a chat with you about that. But we're coming with just at the end of that, our first chunk of interview. So if it's okay with you, I'm going to stop was here and then we'll have a quick break. And then we'll pop back and talk a little bit more about that. Okay, yeah,

b) Parts 2 of 3

25th September 2020

I'm going record one and record number two. Great. So this is Richard Minkley interviewing Liam Webber at 2pm on the dot on Friday the 25th of September 2020 for the Missimp oral history project. Okay, so before we were before we went for a little break, we were talking about the marketing and event management stuff and the role that minder was beginning to play. And that first idea came up when you started talking about Facebook So it's interesting because Facebook becomes quite an important place for the community. So at this point did the Facebook group exist? of Missimp members

Liam Webber 50:12

so the Missimp members group predates me, and I think it's maybe like 10 years old, or something ridiculous. Like, I think I really is quite like old in terms of like, when I said, like, what, sorry, I'm just gonna close the door. [door closes] in terms of like, what I was talking about, in terms of like, Facebook usage, and then specifically that this was the first show we'd ever used paid ads on.

Richard Minkley 50:44

Wow. Okay, so do what did you? Do you remember what you paid and what you paid for?

Liam Webber 50:52

Yeah, cuz we did it every smash night for the rest of like. So you can use paid advertising on Facebook, um, what you do is you, you see, it's a through year event page, you click on your event, and it's like, boost this event, or whatever it's called. And you pick your audience, and you filter down your audience and write the copy for the event. And then set a time limit and it has you can only spend, the minimum spend is one pound per day. So we put 10 pounds on each ad for smash night, and ran it for the 10 days before the event. And this was you know, this was this came out of multiple chats I had with Minder where she was talking me through the basic ideas of marketing and stuff like that. So she helped craft the her and Lloydie actually both both provided a lot of support and like crafting the copy for the event.

Richard Minkley 51:57

Now, I'm sure that there are loads of individual like, formatting

Liam Webber 52:04

pardon?

Richard Minkley 52:05

I'm sure there are loads of different ways of, you know, copywriting knowledge that just tiny little things that help you write an advert. However, it feels like,

Liam Webber 52:18

yeah,

Richard Minkley 52:18

there was a kind of broader change from the way that you've spoken about it before a broader change to how Missimp approached its audience. So did you feel like you were changing how you were interacting with audience with using a Facebook ad like that? Or was it just a sense of like, doing what you had, but somewhere else?

Liam Webber 52:44

It's hard to say really, like, you know, you got to remember, this was the first thing I ever organised the Missimp. They'd never really advertised the drop-ins you know, you had to search for like, improv in Nottingham to get to Missimp horrendous website. It was dreadful. I still have like PTSD flashbacks, that godforsaken website.

Richard Minkley 53:11

we already spent a long time in the last interview talking about the website, aw your face looks so sad.

Liam Webber 53:18

Is Yeah, just if you could just know the paller.

Richard Minkley 53:25

And for the rest of the rest of history for

Liam Webber 53:28

the rest of the interview, you like a fucking ghost. Yeah. So I don't know I was coming at it. The way that I'd I'd organised and advertised Edinburgh shows. At this point, at the point that I was running, smash night in Nottingham, I was running clusterfuck at the Edinburgh Fringe, and also in London. And I was, I'd, you know, I ran gigs for the band. And I'd done all of this and that it was just approaching it from exactly the same way. The thing was that Minder had this expertise in marketing and event management and, and she brought a number of the things like for example. You know, when people come on the door, how do you how have you found out about this event, and that was how we kept track of whether Facebook ads were worth it. And we actually never had a show where Facebook ads didn't at least pay for themselves, which is quite cool. Really. Because that's like two new people into the community every smash night at least.

Richard Minkley 54:38

Wow.

Liam Webber 54:39

Which is one of the reasons why we kept doing it. Right. Like I think that was that was one of the main things that minder brought was this idea of like, like, almost checking up on how we're doing, you know, we don't just we don't just spend money advertising this event, we then check how actually that advertising is

Richard Minkley 54:59

right

Liam Webber 55:00

Whether the advertising is worked or not,

Richard Minkley 55:01

it's interesting,

Liam Webber 55:02

and then we can like narrow it down. And she also had like all of the like, theory on like, you know, best way to sell stuff is to put people who are smiling on the picture and all this stuff, which sounds really fucking obvious. But unless you have someone who knows what they're talking about tell you it, you don't really think about it. Or I at the very least don't think about it. And Missimp as a whole definitely didn't think about it. And so like, I think there was an element of like that, that, you know, we changed, changed our approach a bit.

Richard Minkley 55:36

It's interesting, you said, you filter down your

Liam Webber 55:38

in how we market shows, because now, now we do that for every show, right? Like even the nonsuch shows before were cancelled. Were operating very similar thing of like, we have a Facebook advert for it, we spend a bit more money on the nonsuch shows. We do this and that, you know, the model hasn't really changed a whole lot.

c) Parts 3 of 3

25th September 2020

Richard Minkley 55:57

Yeah, we are back. Sorry about that. We just got cut off. We were about six minutes into the interview. So I just need to write down some numbers. It's gonna take four minutes. Cool. Sorry about that. You were telling us about? Actually, just to be very quick. This is Richard Minkley, interviewing Liam Webber at seven minutes past two on Friday, the 25th of September 2020. For the Missimp oral history project. We just had a failure in the recorder, and I've plugged it back in. What was the filter that you put on the ads for these are the ones who now aren't they?

Liam Webber 56:33

Oh, yeah. So this is one from like, so we were gonna have 10,000 million love stories come to Nottingham in March, which got cancelled. And we have things like so 10,000 millions of stories is a it's basically a improv show that's inspired by romance and true romantic stories from audience members. Okay, so that's the that's the thesis that like, all of our advertising would have been around like, you know, come and fall in love. Watch two people fall in love, you know, comedy stuff? And so you've got in there you've got a lot of things like,

Richard Minkley 57:09

watch people fall in love, you know, comedy stuff.

Liam Webber 57:16

Look,

Richard Minkley 57:17

I get it. I get it. Sorry. I just had to call that out.

Liam Webber 57:20

Yeah, we have stuff like improvisation improv, comedy, clubs, comedy, improvisational theatre, the improv. Whose Line is it Anyway, and then a number of Whose Line is it Anyway, stars, you know, Paul merton.

Richard Minkley 57:33

Okay,

Liam Webber 57:34

Colin Mochrie, Ryan Stiles, famous improvisers who it's like, you know, these are people who, if you like Paul merton, you might like improv, right? Like, that's the idea. If you like this, you might like improv

Richard Minkley 57:44

that's quite specific. I suppose I was expecting.

Liam Webber 57:47

absolutely is. It absolutely is and so like, but then you go on top of that, and you say like, Okay, so we've got for this specific show where we've got this show is about love stories. We've also gone for

like Richard Curtis romantic comedies Hugh Grant, How I Met Your Mother. So it's not just about like focusing in on people who like the improv, it's about focusing in on stuff like the second bit about the show, right? So if it was like rhymes, and it was a musical show, you'd be like, Who likes the improv stuff? And we generally kept the improv tags, the same. Every show. And then if it was rhymes performing, we would be like, musical theatre, musicals, Oklahoma, whatever, right?

Richard Minkley 58:27

Yeah,

Liam Webber 58:27

it was vox pops performing. And you're saying, like, it was like an improvised sketch show, then maybe we would do like a bunch of skit. Yeah, right. Like, our target would, we would target the advert to match what's said in the ad copy, so that when the copy shows up on the screen, it's like, the way that Facebook works, is like, because you like this, you're being shown this. And then so it's like, because you like sketch comedy, is the show for an improvised sketch show that's within 30 miles of your house. And while we you say, it sounds like really specific, super specific and super narrow, because you only have to take one of the boxes or two of the boxes. I think the way it works is the more of the boxes you tick, the more likely you are to get shown the thing right. And you set like a you set a zone, So you said we set like Nottingham plus 20 miles or whatever nine plus 30 miles. And while it feels very specific, actually, according to this specific advert, our potential reaches 1.1 million people. Which is huge.

Richard Minkley 59:27

Wow, that is.

Liam Webber 59:28

and so yeah, its massive and like, you know, if you have if we're, if we're saying like we're going to spend a pound a day, the average for facebook advertising at the moment is that it reaches zero to six people per day if you're spending one pound on an advert. So if we spend 10 pounds then we reach 50 people that we spend

Richard Minkley 59:53

that makes it sound very disappointing if you're looking for six people every day from over A million people but then again, I suppose that's why it's so cheap. But so that's that's a huge thing. So is it conscious? The idea of using other media like film and film stars, TV stars, stage shows, TV, movie titles, is it conscious to pick things like that to lure people into improv? Or is there some other reason why it was often movie stars?

Liam Webber 1:00:29

That that's, you know, with improv The problem is like with with selling improv, at least is the problem is in, you know, how much how much do you read of advertising copy, you know, 20 words. 10 words, five words. You know, you know, people don't read a lot. You know, if you've got a nice picture you might get if you've got a good picture along With it, you might get a decent, a few more people reading it for a bit longer. If you've got a nice video, people might watch the video. Problem with improv is you've got to say what improv is within five words within 10 words why, you know, you don't know what improv is, you've got to be bought over on this whole art form that you don't know exists within five words. 10 words? That's difficult. Easiest way to do it is you like you aim at people who like ROM

coms. And you say it's a rom com made up on the spot. Yeah. And they go I like ROM coms made up on the spot. sounds dangerous, and they'll read the rest of the blurb. Yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:01:33

I feel like you've just summarised genre theory for us.

Liam Webber 1:01:37

This is it. But this is what genre improv shows are so popular, right? This is why the biggest shows in the UK are showstopper and austentatious. Because people in the UK like I know, a fucking musical is or I know what Jane Austen is, and I'm willing, and then you find like the niche group of people who know what it is, and are willing to take the risk on someone being able to make up something that's within that style. It feels like less of a risk to the audience when you know and like when improves whole thing is like this is a risk, right? Like we're making this up on the spot that to an audience who like maybe like, you know, they're spending five, smash nights great success is the fact that it was a low price. price point, really, like you know, people will spend five, people will take a risk on five pounds, that they won't necessarily take a risk on 10 pounds. And then you've got other stuff, right? So you can charge more if you're performing at the Playhouse because people look at the Playhouse and go I trust the Playhouse. Therefore, I'm willing to take more of a risk. Whereas if you go like we're putting on a show in a old fucking heavy metal music, music venue. And it's improvised. There's no script. You have no idea what you're going to see we have no idea what we're about to put on. But we have faith in it. You're asking a lot from an audience. Right? Right. So yeah, so that's, that's it. That's, that's why that's why genre sells. And it's one of the things that I hate most about improv really is that is the fact that like, there is almost a requirement on a lot of it to like, tend towards a genre show or like, you know, genre shows are so successful because they sell better generally, or they sell easier, generally speaking. You know, and that's why you want a show like smash tonight, really, or you want a, or like nonsuch where like, we have a regular show happening in a regular space or regular time. Because you'll get people once with like a specific bit of copy. And then they'll be like, I enjoyed that. I'll come back and suddenly they're actually coming back because it's improv rather than, you know that that that's the bit that's, that's our aim. That's always the aim in the show's right is to like, get people to come back to the next show, because it's improv rather than to come to the next show, because it's a musical.

Richard Minkley 1:03:45

That's fascinating. I'm gonna draw a line under smash night. Well, not not entirely because it continues. However, I'm aware that while this is happening, we talked about having multiple things happening in parallel. Were you involved with the courses? I know that you've been on a course. But when did you start getting involved in running the courses?

Liam Webber 1:04:14

Not until after Parky left. Before

Richard Minkley 1:04:18

that's actually about where we are. We're in January 2018. In the chronology of things. Do you remember the first time you taught on a course? Again, we have the face of a man who doesn't remember?

Liam Webber 1:04:37

Yeah,

Richard Minkley 1:04:38

this is permissible, if you can't remember it to the dot,

Liam Webber 1:04:41

not not to the dot. I can, you know, I can tell you the vague chronology of events because I remember that. And so, like up until, you know Parky left in FEB 18. I think is that. is that ratified by your accounts as well?

Richard Minkley 1:04:56

It sounds about right.

Liam Webber 1:04:59

I think that's I've got terrible memory for dates. Before before he left like all of the courses were taught exclusively by Marilyn and Parky. And when he left we got so Parky Parky's exit was also joined by Minder. So minder and Parky left at the same time. And that left the six of us, myself Lloydie. Ben nick Marilyn and Emily.

Richard Minkley 1:05:33

Okay,

Liam Webber 1:05:33

that was, and then we represent the first exec official exec as described as an exec, which again, was my terminology.

Richard Minkley 1:05:42

So in that case, well, so the formation of the exec was before diving into the courses a bit more.

Liam Webber 1:05:51

was, was certainly before I started teaching on the courses.

Richard Minkley 1:05:54

So in that case, let's let's go with it chronologically, then we were talking about. And you've said this a couple of times that it's your Well, it's not your fault, but you're part of the reasons why it is called an exec. So let's go from

Liam Webber 1:06:07

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:06:10

We've already talked about why it was difficult having all of you the difficulty in the culture of the exec or the difficulty in how it worked. Let's go from just after Minder and Parky left, what happened in that time that formed into the exec

Liam Webber 1:06:28

it was apparent Like as is the nature of like everything that happened? It was it was apparent that that we needed to alter the way that we operated. Exactly how we were going to do that was was a difficult question. We weren't 100% sure. But it was apparent. And and so. And there was some other stuff

around that time that was coming about, like Lloydie was really pushing for is to incorporate in some way that we were still unknown Incorporated community group at the time. And Lloydie really, you know, sensibly was was was like, we need some more formality around this. I got much more involved in policy at that point. And like, procedure, and because of because of how everything went down was like, basically, we need to, we need a code of conduct.

Richard Minkley 1:07:36

This is interesting. Sorry, carry on. I interrupted

Liam Webber 1:07:39

everyone did everyone like, yeah, everyone agreed. That was that was that was what we were gonna do. And so I built this code of conduct. And the way that I built that well the first draft of the Code of Conduct was based in so my parents work in my dad works in the charity sector, and my mom works in the local council but has worked in a number of organisations, but like, predominantly in the voluntary sector, and like, a lot of my like, stuff around, like, how is this form? How do you form like, these are, and those are the people who I was asking, like, how do you? How do you form? How, how do we do this? How do I do this? Right?

Richard Minkley 1:07:41

Yeah,

Liam Webber 1:07:45

I have no idea. I've never done it before. How do I do this? And so I got tonnes of examples of like, codes of conduct from a variety of different places. And

Richard Minkley 1:08:38

so did you ask your mum and your

Liam Webber 1:08:39

conversations with my parents.

Richard Minkley 1:08:41

Oh, I was. I hate it when I asked a question. Only to interrupt to the answer I was looking for. So you, you got all this stuff from your parents?

Liam Webber 1:08:52

Yeah. And like other places, right, like, you know, asked for examples of codes of conduct from like Lloydie got us a copy of the one from the Bristol improv theatre, I think, looked at hoopla's online and stuff like that. And I was, I was just really lucky that my, you know, my dad wrote all of the policies for the or like, was one of the people behind all the policies for the charity he works for so like, I would be like, this is, you know, I looked at my policy, and I wrote some of it out, and he'd had come back to me and be like, this is great, but it's like 18 pages long and no one's gonna read a code of conduct 18 pages long you need something, you know, it needs to be effective, but but also like, the way their code of conduct is effective is that someone can read it and take in, if not the exact specific specificity of it because that will be available like they can at least take in the core values of it, the core ethos of it, the general idea of it. going back to the drawing board, but the term exec committee comes from like talking to my mum about how to run businesses. At the time, we were talking about getting an oversight board. Which I never managed to like, which was, you know, that was something that I'm,

that's probably one of my big regrets is that I didn't manage to actually make that happen. But there just wasn't enough real interest from other people to like make that actually occur.

Richard Minkley 1:10:16

Yeah,

Liam Webber 1:10:16

but in my initial you know, like, structure document, I propose, like a three scale. And the structure document was I say it's me, but it was like, you know, it was written in conjunction like me and Lloydie talked battered about a lot of ideas. Emily was almost definitely involved. Everyone would have been involved, really everyone would have been involved in like, talking about it and ratifying it, but like, I was the one who fucking wrote it down on Microsoft Word. So that's why I'm saying it's me. But don't think for a second that all this work is made as like, you know,

Richard Minkley 1:10:49

everyone's ideas, but it's your blood, sweat and tears on the keyboard.

Liam Webber 1:10:53

Yeah, yeah, exactly. And so like, the initial idea was like that, we would have this oversight board, the exec committee, and then a community forum. And so the exec committee is the people who'd like run it day to day and the other to kind of feed ideas into it.

Richard Minkley 1:11:11

wow

Liam Webber 1:11:12

And the reality was that actually just setting up that kind of system was too much to try and do while also running Missimp as an entirely voluntary thing, where like, all of us were just fucking spent the whole time like, and, and it the, you know, there are frustrations about that, I think, you know, it's taken a long time to get from my, you know, this is the stuff that I was talking about in 2018. Right, and it's two years later, and we're finally extending the exec in a way that while it doesn't, necessarily doesn't look the same as like, the initial, the thing, the result is that a wider range of voices within the community are having are going to have a say. And its taken, you know, it takes mistaken fucking two years. Everything else gets in the way all the time. But

Richard Minkley 1:12:06

in in Missimp's, defense, the world has ended a couple of times since, especially since we last spoke, like there was literally a pandemic.

Liam Webber 1:12:16

Absolutely, but as you know, but like, its taken the pandemic for us to actually have the time in order to like, stop, slow down and actually enact some large scale structural changes. And that's, I think that's the thing, if you've made this, you're making this oral history that one of the points of this oral history is to, like, provide an insight into like running a community like this and building a building a business like this, that someone who is in a different city might want to listen to it and be like, Okay, so this is how they did it, then, I guess the one thing that I'd say is like, is that is like you realistically, like making large scale structural changes, while maintaining constant activity is almost impossible, or at least was for us as like a voluntary organisation where everyone else is in either full time education or full time

work. So understanding that and like, understanding, understanding that's really important and giving yourself like leeway on that's really important, because I beat myself up really hard for a really long time that I wasn't able to enact the change that I wanted to enact, while also, you know, teaching one night a week, rehearsing two nights a week performing the other three nights a week, right, like, while doing a second degree. So, you know, that was just my life. And it's taken the world stopping for us to actually have enough time to be like, Okay, how do we do this? How do we do this properly? And I think, you know, we're going to be in a much stronger position to coming out of lockdown than we were going into it. And actually, there might be enough people on the exact now that we could make some larger scale, more interesting structural changes.

Richard Minkley 1:13:54

Well, that sounds like Missimp future, which I'm, I'm not really interested in at the minute. Like, burn it to the ground for all I care is the past that matters. That's just please, Richard just put some sarcasm in quotes on the transcript for that one. So that's interesting. Was there any particular influences or than like? You said, you talked to your mom about voluntary and organisations and charities? Was there any particular examples of things that influenced that formation? Like, was there a particular document? I mean, you mentioned the Bristol Theatre thing, but was there like an organisation or template or a number?

Liam Webber 1:14:42

All charities have to have a board right, like, so all charities have the person who runs it like the chief executive officer or whatever. There's that word executive again. Yeah, they all have that and they have a board and the board is on top of that, and the board's job is to look at what you're Doing the like, is what you're doing in line with the goals and ideals of this charity. Having gone through all the [-] stuff and gone through the change that came with [-] leaving the exec, we began to have more conversations, that I don't think the conversations actually really happened in a way that I was satisfied with until after Lloydie left in July or August that year, we started to actually have conversations about what we wanted Missimp to be. And the main thing that came out of it was it was a community organisation, that it was like some the the community the nottingham community was at the heart of what we do. Which to me immediately made the parallel to like, what charities do important. You know, like, we as a group, you know, it's great to have a group of people who are energized enough to actually want to run this thing and run it in that manner. But do we have people holding us accountable to our actions do we have and also like, you know, the great thing about having if you get like a board of people who meet once or twice a year, is that you then can put that and put, people getting put on that board might have advice that, you know, the people we were looking at would be local business, and people people who've run, you know, and they would have advice to you know. And the fact is, like, I still sought advice from a number of people, like, particularly, there's a incredible woman called Joe Bradley, who did one of our classes. A long time ago, that turned out to just be a friend of my mom's

Richard Minkley 1:16:46

Oh,

Liam Webber 1:16:46

and they worked in this kind of space. And she she gave us a bunch of she well she gave me a bunch of her time, and resources around like planning and how to. And the idea is that she would that she would have been a key member on the Oversight Board. But that kind of never came to pass. But she still gave a lot of time and advice which I was encouraged, which I'm still incredibly thankful for. I know

that other people who donated similar degrees of time, similar amounts of like, you know, what's his name, I can't remember his name at the Bristol improv theatre, Andy yo, who Lloydie knows well, who was like, he had a lot to say and a lot to help. [...] like stuff like that, you know. So while we didn't, we didn't get the board meeting regularity regularly in a way that I wanted, and that I thought would be useful and to degree necessary. We did get a lot of a lot of support information and that.

Richard Minkley 1:17:50

Here's a question for you

Liam Webber 1:17:51

like, Martin McGuinness, Mike McGinnis. Matt McGinnis(*). Nicks mate, who runs furthest from the sea as well.

Richard Minkley 1:17:57

Oh, yes. I will put one of those names in the transcript(*). Why didn't it become a private company? Like? Because there's a counterfactual here where you could have gone down that route, but you didn't. Was it ever considered or was it considered and it just didn't work?

Liam Webber 1:18:17

Yeah. So actually, that was our initial both. You know? Really, that was Lloydie's, Lloydie's deal was Lloydie wanted to incorporate. I supported that as an idea because it protected us right. someone breaks their leg. I'm not personally liable as the person who runs this group, it's the company that's liable. And that appealed to me.

Richard Minkley 1:18:43

I have to check for the record. I have to check for the record. Did anybody break their legs before you incorporated? For the record, you know, I no. Okay,

Liam Webber 1:18:55

yeah. You know what I mean.

Richard Minkley 1:18:56

no I did.

Liam Webber 1:18:59

But yeah, and so Lloydie was very into that and Lloydie, Lloydie just wanting to be a limited company. he thought it was easier. It was talking to Matt McGinnis that really got Nick hooked on the idea of a CIC and it became apparent than Nick, that that was what Nick wanted. And what that stuff was kind of going on while Lloydie and Marilyn were falling out over syllabus issues and stuff.

Richard Minkley 1:19:29

Okay.

Liam Webber 1:19:31

So when Lloydie eventually stepped back, amidst falling out with Marilyn, and therefore falling out with Nick as well. That kind of fell onto the back burner a bit and it became apparent that you know, Nick wanted to be CIC I wanted us to incorporate in some way and was willing to And was happy to do that. And so I found a group called chase, case, case co operative and they're called case co-operative,

who are business, business that that run specifically with the interest of like, we're going to help you set up as a business and like, so they talk to like new startup enterprises like what's the business thing thing that fits you best. I got, I got put in contact with him through Jenny Hibbard, who runs ran House of verse which was like, eclectic artists collective thing in Leicester. And he helped them set up as either a co op for CIC. And he was great. And so I we arranged to meet with him. And he was like a CIC seems to fit what you guys want to do. And they offer a number of nice things like with a CIC, obviously, you've got the asset lock, you know that but I guess like,

Richard Minkley 1:21:10

the asset lock is that if your company buys something, it becomes locked and can only be sold for the full amount, or be passed on to another asset locked organisation.

Liam Webber 1:21:21

When you as when you as an organisation closed, the interesting thing was that when you as an organisation closed down, that all of your stuff needs to be passed on to a similar CiC, you can't just sell off and take the profit. So and so case co operative, do some cool stuff around that stuff. Like if we

Richard Minkley 1:21:41

I'm going to pull us out this one a little bit, because I'm aware that we have gotten very, very far away from improv. Like, we have gone from talking about these improv shows to talking about corporate structure and influences around that. Was there a point in this process where you had a similar moment where you were like, we're not in Kansas anymore?

Liam Webber 1:22:05

Certainly, I wasn't. Yeah, I think, no. there's, you know, it just came along with like us doing more stuff, we have more money coming in. And then there's also, you know, the bonus of a CIC was that it kind of binds a company to acting in a certain way or to having like a more specific remit. Which, which allowed us feel to feel like we could potentially easily relatively easily step down as directors and other people come in, and the goal of Missimp couldn't change that much. It could still, it would still, you know, someone couldn't come in and immediately just be like, right now, it's just a performing team with eight people. And everyone else, fuck them, you know, it still would have to be this community focused improv organisation, which I think, particularly to Nick appealed. Was there a moment for me I, you know, it happened gradually over time. And it became more and more apparent that this is this would have, you know, this is how it was gonna have to be in order to do stuff. And and this is what I mean by like, you, we couldn't do the large scale structural stuff and the improv stuff at the same time. And that, for me, like what happened was, I just wound up doing more and more of this side of it, I guess, at this point. And looking into it, and I've kind of pulled away a bit from that. Now, Nick does a lot of the background admin, which I'm incredibly thankful for, because, you know, weighs on me a bit heavy, but

Richard Minkley 1:23:53

thats that's, that's really interesting. So we have about, may overrun a tiny bit, but if we've got about 10, 15 minutes left in this morass, one of the other things that I'm aware of that that was happening was influences over the courses. Now, you've mentioned that Lloydie and Marilyn were having disagreements over the syllabus. Was it? That's interesting, because it suggests a syllabus already existed at that point. So I assume, well, yeah, I assume that therefore, Parky and Marilyn had made a syllabus and that it was being reviewed.

Liam Webber 1:24:40

So what's. so you're gonna have to we need to caveat out this with particularly the early stuff, there's a bunch of it that comes from before I was around, and this is stuff that I've heard primarily from Lloydie. And so like, While I believe it to be the truth and like accurate, there, there may be other sides to the story. But this is this is how I understand it is having happened. At some point in the early 2010s, Lloydie, went to UCB in New York, and studied on their level one and level two programs and came back. And basically, when he came back, he brought long form improv to Nottingham. And up until that point, I'm from what I understand it just been pretty much short form. That's all Missimp ever done. Lloydie came back and was like, this is this, we could be doing this. And Lloydie built a three course I believe a three course structure based on what he learned at UCB. and ran, I think maybe one full iteration of 1, 2, 3, maybe one and a bit iterations, maybe only around one and two, I don't know. I don't know the exact, exact attitudes around that you'd have to ask him. But he definitely ran some courses and those course materials were laying around. And Lloydie fell out with Marilyn and Parky. And I had Well, I didn't fall out in Marilyn, Marilyn at that point. I believe, again, I'm not the person to be retelling this, this bit, really, but like, whatever.

Richard Minkley 1:26:30

To be honest, it's not really the individuals involved that is necessarily the important that it's more of like, for example, like the clash of like, what was the difference between the outcomes of if Lloydie have stayed and Lloydie of change? Like what was the actual course material that was being argued over?

Liam Webber 1:26:51

This? So So this is it bring like so Lloydie brings this material back from what I understand. And then when he leaves Marilyn and Parky, take some amount of his level one and two class and teach that a couple of times over like maybe a period of five or six years, I don't really know how many. I don't know the details on that. So when Lloydie comes back in and begins to work with Marilyn on the new courses, I guess he has some those those a level of frustration around like, and I certainly felt that these courses had been built by Marilyn and Parky from a set of ideas maybe four or five years ago. And there was a degree of like preciousness around the ideas. And that, you know, these courses had been taught well, and had got results from like students. Great. But, but it was it was difficult, like, as someone who like, I was like, I, you know, I love improv, and really loves improv, and I'd gone out and I'd done a bunch of training in different places. And I was like, I wanted to bring that and put it into the courses, right and Lloydie felt the same, Ben felt the same, you know, you had a group of new people to their syllabus, who were all pulling in, you know, we're all pulling in slightly different directions, but it was all pulling in quite a different direction from the original syllabus content. And, and that, and that was that was I think that was that was that was difficult in terms of like, you know, Marilyn felt quite strongly about the material but also I think there was those you know, [-] You know, they were teaching a syllabus that was aimed at. Right, the syllabus was aimed at getting people able to perform adequately. So this syllabus was was aiming to get people to be able to perform a show that we weren't performing in anymore.

Richard Minkley 1:29:45

I'm going to ask you to be specific on that. Like, what was the content that made it suitable for Glee Club or in theory suitable for The Glee Club that and what was the ideas that were new and different and were changing?

Liam Webber 1:29:58

There were more, it was It was more geared around short form, I think more geared around short form ideas, or like techniques, you know, the ideas of like how we build characters were were geared around like, short form building characters, as opposed to building characters for long form pieces and stuff like that. But But also, I think, myself and Lloydie, thought there wasn't enough of a step up between levels one and two, at the time, having been through the level one and two thing with Nick with Nick, And with Parky and Maryland, I, I personally didn't like the level two, and that's probably because I did it. I did level one. And then there was like, an 18 month gap where I was like, going out and learning Improv Everywhere else and taking as much as I could, and performing as often as I could.

Richard Minkley 1:30:48

Yeah,

Liam Webber 1:30:48

when I got to level two, it wasn't at the standard, which I expected it to be almost. Which is, you know, on me as much as anything else. But really there was there problems in terms of like, really, the problems came down to communication, they always fucking come down to communication. And, and it became like, there was just like, it became apparent that neither Lloydie nor Marilyn really wanted to relent on that, their side. And I think that just like stuff got heated and fractured, and everyone was reading the worst into everyone else's messages, because it was all being, all the discussions are being done online. And this is another place where I'm like, you know, the bit of me that looks back on it is like, Well, obviously, everything's gonna fall apart, because they were talking via slack. like six hours apart, we should be having these conversations in person, right.

Richard Minkley 1:31:47

So, if I may,

Liam Webber 1:31:49

you know, there was there was other stuff

Richard Minkley 1:31:51

how did you? Because I'm, maybe I may have misread some of the things you said earlier. It sounds like this experience with the courses is something that happened near you, but not including you, did you ever get involved with the process of forming and teaching the courses?

Liam Webber 1:32:11

Initially, yeah. And initially, it was like, you know, there was? you know. And initially, it was everyone around the table, like coming up with vague ideas of what we wanted each week. Of a course,

Richard Minkley 1:32:26

by round the table, you mean on slack?

Liam Webber 1:32:30

no no like,

Richard Minkley 1:32:31

like, actually around the table, okay.

Liam Webber 1:32:34

Actually, around a table. And. And those were, those were fraught enough as it was. But then what wound up happening was, we would divided into, like, who was going to teach this course and who was going to teach this course. And we're trying to divide up teaching of a bit better and a bit more varied amongst the people within the classroom. And Marilyn Lloydie took the level two, which is going to be happening in July, or whenever it was, and over the course of them trying to nail down what exercises they were going to be doing, and like, how they were going to be doing these bits and stuff like that. That's where their relationship really kind of like, got fraught and fell apart. And then after that, it was just about it's just a case of like, both parties kind of escalated things. And again, like that happened kind of near me, but it wasn't

Richard Minkley 1:33:32

okay.

Liam Webber 1:33:33

It wasn't to me. Oh, yeah, I really, I didn't know if I didn't know if I should be the person telling this story.

Richard Minkley 1:33:39

It's interesting, because I feel like it does show an interesting point of view into the exec, that you were feeling this disagreement so heavily when you weren't involved with the decisions being made well you were in it. But that's part of the the

Liam Webber 1:33:56

no, the whole the whole, the whole experience crippled me, you know, like it was, it was a horrible experience.

Richard Minkley 1:34:02

So the experience of what was happening with Marilyn and Lloydie crippled you?

Liam Webber 1:34:08

Yeah. Yeah, it was dreadful. My relationship with Lloydie deteriorated almost completely after that for a while. As as it did with Nick and Marilyn, like, I think you know, though, there have been a number of things like since then have happened that have continued this kind of process, but it was one of the things that made me be like, I just can't have friends here. Yeah, which sounds really depressing. Little bit, little bit. There was like, you know, like I said, it's very difficult to describe, but like, it was just exhausting. It was exhausting to deal with and to and to be in the middle of. As someone who was like guys can we not, just, like, fucking get on. And the answer was just no. And like, sometimes people do just fall out. And that's just it. And then there was a thing that happened that like, there was like, you know, there's just a number, like, the incidents themselves weren't like, you know, call them incidents makes it sound like people coming to blows they weren't, you know, but there were just a number of things, and one of them happened to smash right that they will both at. and I think that was the that was, that was the bit that like, fucking tore it for me because that was, that was my space, you know, like, that was the space that I'm, I have a duty of care over that I hold that this is like, and you guys can't fucking be civil. The amount of you know, the amount of time I spent talking to both sides of that divide. I really, it really, really had a really dreadful impact on like, my brain space and my

Richard Minkley 1:36:12

I imagine so.

Liam Webber 1:36:13

My motivation for Missimp. And, and everything you know, it was it was really difficult time.

Richard Minkley 1:36:18

This is this is well, it may be appropriate that this is going to be so abrupt, we're very close to the end of the interview. did all of this difficulty that you've just been describing, the strife, was that in the run up to the... uh oh, my internet connection is unstable. But was that in the run up to the 20th anniversary? That that was all happening? because that that's, there's an irony to that. Like, how did what do you remember of the 20th anniversary?

Liam Webber 1:36:55

so what wound up happening was the 20th anniversary which was you know, an idea Lloydie cultivated really and like pushed for. And the design of the whole event was was him really, it was like, he was the contact with the Playhouse etc. etc you know. That was it was all you know, he did an awful lot of really incredible work on to make that come to fruition and to make that event as successful as it was. And what happened was Lloydie basically tendered his resignation in July, August, attended his resignation sounds really formal, but you know, it wasn't, you know, he said that he was stepping down and he wanted to be part of that event. And then that would be the last thing that he did. And that was fair. And so I kind of worked on that event with Lloydie. And we're and like, as like almost that kind of like person in the middle between Lloydie and Marilyn and Nick. And you know, and that was that was a case of like I was literally in the middle of a thing that just continued to deteriorate, you know, their relationship just continued to deteriorate and people kept making choices on both sides to deteriorate things which was just fucking exhausting for me and you know, so we got to the point at the end of it where I didn't really have a great deal of trust or respect or admiration for either party and and that was really you know, that was really difficult and and it's very difficult as well because it's the thing I care about right I care about Missimp i put a lot into it and for it to be torn apart over like fucking syllabus detail. Like other stuff happened. I'm sure you've talked to both sides of that fucking divide already. But like for it to happen over syllabus material. I'm like, Guys, this is this is dumb like

Richard Minkley 1:39:14

it. It's interesting,

Liam Webber 1:39:17

And yeah, I just I just for a long time I just resented having been put through that.

Richard Minkley 1:39:22

It's It's interesting. And it's a way of bringing some ideas together here. Earlier, we were talking about how we started on improv. And then we were started talking about finance. And it we felt like we were a long way away from improv in in our previous interview as well, we were talking about how you were struggling with some of your commitments to Missimp and dealing with that. And and now we have a while again asking about the Missimp 20th anniversary, and there's this other stuff, dragging your attention away from it. Like I was going to say like Do you remember any of the actual events of the 20th anniversary? Or did this kind of stuff interfere with your memory of it?

Liam Webber 1:40:10

I mean, it massively overshadowed it really, I don't know, I couldn't tell you what really happened, I couldn't tell you what show I put, I definitely performed in a show, but I couldn't tell you which one.

Richard Minkley 1:40:22

That's

Liam Webber 1:40:26

I think and. But it's like, you know, for that, for that. For the event for the 20th anniversary, you know, like I was helping with front of house and i was photographer as well. As well as like helping to run behind the scenes and trying to mediate between Lloydie and Marilyn and nick. And I do want to say like, I for me, now it's water under the bridge. i still get cross about it when I think about like what they put me through, but like, I've repaired my relationship with both sides now. And I feel much more chill about it than I did. And I have a greater degree of understanding of why things got to that point. But I guess I guess I was just, like, even like, even then I was frustrated. And now looking back, I'm even more like frustrated and angry about the fact that like, these were people twice my age, right?

Richard Minkley 1:41:29

Yeah,

Liam Webber 1:41:30

these were people like twice my age who have existed in the real world and have had jobs and like, and I was a fucking, like, 23, 24 year old guy who was like being asked to mediate having never mediated or being at, you know, like me,

Richard Minkley 1:41:44

meanwhile, writing the Articles of Association for [...] company

Liam Webber 1:41:49

being put in this being put in this position. And, and I do resent that, that like that for like, large portions of my time and Missimp for one reason or another, the thing I've been, I've not been able to focus on the thing that I do it for, right? Especially because like, by all accounts, it's something I'm relatively good at.

Richard Minkley 1:42:14

Yeah, well, no, no, no, you are absolutely very good at it. Honestly, there's so many more questions. I've barely scratched the surface, but I'm gonna have to bring this to a close. I'm going to finish, especially with what we've been talking about just then I'm going to finish with the same question that I asked last time, but in the specific context of leading things. You and again, we're not talking about the future, just that this area of time that we've just gone through? Why did you keep coming back to Missimp and trying to make these things happen and be part of that leadership force.

Liam Webber 1:42:54

I'm a hopeless idealist, right, like, hopeless optimist. Pretend to be a realist and a pragmatist, but that's simply not the case. I just, you know, I have a genuine honest belief that like this can be like, I love improv. I just do, I just have a very genuine, deep enjoyment of the art form and, and, and, and what it can do for me and what it can do for other people. And, you know, while this was really horrible and stressful to deal with, like kinda like the 20th anniversary, you know, I don't remember the events of the 20th anniversary. But one thing I do remember about the 20th anniversary is the is after both the

opening night and the closing night, being in the bar with a community of people that is 60, 70, 100 people strong. From a community that was 10 people in a shit place, you know, we're suddenly this community of like, 100 people, all of whom are established performers, all of whom have just played on the biggest stage in the city. And, you know, like moments like that, you go like, well, and people I'm like, moments like that, where, you know, I'd be sat alone at the bar, and someone would come up to me and be like, thank you, and be like, Oh, no, we recognise that this has occurred because of the work that you've done. Right? It kind of just makes it worth it.

Richard Minkley 1:44:27

Wow.

Liam Webber 1:44:27

So I guess that's that's kind of why I didn't want to do it.

Richard Minkley 1:44:30

I'm gonna hate myself for asking this. But when you said you said, I love improv, and then you kind of made a face like [myah]. Almost as if, like, you know what, the thing you were saying was something joyful in the face You said it was was something so I don't know how to describe it. It was almost like I don't get I don't really care. I love it and it hurts and I don't know what to do

Liam Webber 1:44:53

like yeah but I think. I think that's right, like i love it and it hurts. Like All my life, I've compulsively made stuff. That's that's my, that's my, how I operate. That's how I feel some sense of like, self worth and like the, my existence is meaningful and what brings me joy is making things. And, you know, for a while it was theatre pieces for a while that was musicals for a while it was being in a band for a while, and it was stand up. And at the moment, it's improv. I've started writing stuff at the moment, I'm really enjoying doing that as well. But like, at the moment, it's improv and make stuff I do stuff and I put stuff out there. And that's the thing more than anything in all the world that fills my soul. I've not got like an interest in becoming famous or being on the biggest stages. I just do this because it's what I do, and it's why I love doing. and making things is a necessary part of me being me. And that is painful experience as well as like a joyful one, right? Like, that's kind of the necess theres almost a necessity. like

Richard Minkley 1:46:08

Yeah there is a there's a sense of endeavour to it, which could be successful and could fail.

Liam Webber 1:46:16

Yeah.

Richard Minkley 1:46:16

Which I imagine a lot of people will empathise with,

Liam Webber 1:46:19

and, and even even saying that isn't quite, because the success of it is the doing it. You know, the success of like an improv show isn't how well received the improv show was it was the fact that we just did an improv show. And, you know, I would rather be able to go outside tonight and do the worst improv show I've ever done in front of an audience who hate it, than to sit inside because it's the pandemic, right? Like, I don't like I love it. When an audience likes what I do. I love it when people I

loved it, when people listen to my music and enjoyed it. I love it when people enjoy the things I make. but i make stuff because I have to make stuff because if I'm not making stuff, then I don't think I'm quite me. Missimp is a place that's allowed me to make some really good stuff.

Richard Minkley 1:47:06

Yeah.

Liam Webber 1:47:07

And I'm very thankful for that. And I'm really appreciative of that. And there's a community within Missimp that support me in making stuff in a way that very few communities I've had have. That's excellent, and great. And I guess there's a degree of me that's just like, well, it's worth the pain that comes with that sometimes, because I actually have a number of incredible collaborators here too. And, you know, sometimes it might, the case with Lloydie. Like, you know, fucking hell sometimes he's a pain in the ass to work, but actually, he's probably one of the best collaborators I've ever had and someone who I really enjoy working with. And so,

Richard Minkley 1:47:40

you know, what?

Liam Webber 1:47:41

That comes with? being friends with someone is worth being friends with them. Right?

Richard Minkley 1:47:45

And, yeah, I know what you mean. And, again, so much to talk about, but I'm going to have to bring it to an end because I just realised with the additional bit that we ran over we boy have we run over. But Liam, it's been fantastic. Thank you so much for your time it. You know what I'm gonna have to do it. Is there anything else you want to say before we wrap up because I give everybody the opportunity. No?

Liam Webber 1:48:08

No, i don't think so.

Richard Minkley 1:48:10

Great. Thank you very much for your time. and stop there.

THE END

For this chapter at least

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